SERMONS

Wilson

PAROCHIAL SERMONS.

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BY THE

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PREFACE.

SEVERAL of my hearers having expressed an opinion that some of my later and shorter Sermons would be acceptable and useful, I have ventured to commit to the Press this small Volume; to be followed, perhaps, by another, if they should meet with a favourable reception.

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THE FATHER OF THE FATHERLESS.

PAROCHIAL SERMONS.

I.

REPENTANCE UNTO LIFE.

'Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.'—Isa. i. 18.

HUMAN nature being fallen and corrupt, we have, all of us, great difficulty to live a godly, righteous, and sober life. Our perpetual danger is to be content with a form of godliness, while we remain strangers to the power of it; and hence we have great need habitually to examine and watch ourselves, lest we retain only a name that we live, and are dead.

And that which is our difficulty and danger has been the difficulty and danger of our forefathers in the professing Church in all ages. Spiritual and practical religion is not, and never was, and never will be, easy to flesh and blood.

Hence the tendency of all false religions, and of all corruptions of the true religion, has ever been to put something of a formal and ceremonial kind in the place of a really holy and righteous life. God, our Maker and Observer, has been well aware of this tendency; and therefore, throughout the Holy Scriptures, both of the Old and New Testaments, He has been very particular and clear in letting us know that in vain do we worship Him by an imposing ritual if our personal conduct is unholy and unjust. This is the point He was endeavouring to impress on His nominal people, the Jews, in the passage from which the text is taken. In the fourth verse of the chapter He had exclaimed against them, 'Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers!'

We might have supposed from this that there was no appearance of religion among them. Quite the contrary! There was an appearance, a great appearance of it; but, alas! only an appearance, no reality: and therefore God proceeds to express, in the strongest terms, His absolute contempt and abhorrence of their showy worship, while, all the time, they were practically living in sin. In v. 11, He breaks out thus:—'To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord: I am full of the burnt-offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he-goats.

When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand to tread my courts?'

Now, in a certain sense, God had required this at their hands to tread His courts; and, at first sight, it surprises us that He should seem to deny having required it. There is no doubt He had required these various sacrifices to be offered to Him, because their number, and kind, and modes of oblation are exactly laid down in His law. What, then, does He mean by saying, 'Who hath required this at your hands to tread my courts?' What He means will be plain to us from one or two other passages of Scripture. Look first in Jer. vii. 21: 'Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; Put your burnt-offerings unto your sacrifices, and eat flesh. For I spake not unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt-offerings or sacrifices: but this thing commanded I them, saying, Obey my voice.'

The contrast which the Lord intended is yet plainer from Samuel's words to Saul, when that perverse king had offered sacrifices abundantly, but, at the same time, had gone in action clean contrary to what God had enjoined him. He tried to justify himself, as having acted in a very religious manner, but Samuel cut him short with these pointed questions: 'Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt-offerings as in obeying the voice of the

Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.' When, therefore, God said, 'Who hath required this ritual of sacrifices at your hands to tread my courts?' He evidently meant, 'I never required it as the main matter—I never required it as a thing about which I cared any further than as an outward expression of your inward piety—I never minded sacrifices as compared with obedience to my moral commandments—and especially, I never meant to have those sacrifices offered me instead of practical good conduct. If your obedience of heart, lip, and life, is denied me, then have done with all ceremonial worship.' 'Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me: I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear.' Why not? 'Your hands are full of blood.' There was 'the dead fly' which made their ointment of sacrifices to send forth an evil savour into the Divine nostrils; there was the practical bad conduct which rendered all their outward worship offensive to a holy God. 'He is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on iniquity.' Therefore, while sin was

cherished in the hearts of His professing people, and indulged in their daily life, He could hold no communion with them: they drew near to Him in vain—they went through all the forms of religion to no purpose. They might pray to Him as long as they liked, but He 'was as a deaf man, and heard not:' they might offer any amount of costly sacrifices for sin, but they would be of no avail. 'Iniquity,' loved, cherished, practised, persisted in, 'separated between them and their God;' and He tells them the separation was complete, so long as their iniquity should continue. Hence, there was no hope, no possibility, of their acceptance with Him, till they should 'repent, and turn to Him, and do works meet for repentance:' but that if they would indeed forsake sin, and honestly set themselves to do what was lawful and right, then He was prepared to receive, forgive, and sanctify them. 'Wash you,' He says, 'make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes, cease to do evil, learn to do well, seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. Come now' (*i.e.* come upon the supposition and the fact that you have now set yourselves to 'abhor that which is evil, and cleave to that which is good'), 'and let us reason together,' and talk the matter over, and I will show you how I have provided means whereby, now that you are truly penitent, you may be pardoned and accepted by me in the fullest

manner; and 'though your sins be as scarlet' at present, 'they shall be white as snow; and though they be red like crimson now, they shall be as wool.'

Looking, therefore, at the Old Testament evidence, the mind of God is as plain as possible from this chapter of Isaiah, that no formal worship will please Him while the conduct of the worshipper is unholy and wrong; and that sinful practices must be given up, and the heart steadfastly set to obey His commandments, or else there is no forgiveness and no acceptance.

And the doctrine of the New Testament is entirely to the same effect. When John the Baptist introduced the doctrine, he came 'preaching the baptism of repentance in order to the remission of sins;' and expressly taught the people that there was no hope of salvation for them but through real repentance and change of mind, and practical amendment of life. 'Now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.'

And when our Lord Himself had entered on His public ministry, what is St. Matthew's account of it? He says, 'From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.' He said again, 'I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.' When He had ordained the twelve Apostles, and

sent them forth to preach, St. Mark says, 'They went out, and preached everywhere that men should repent.' And when, after His resurrection, He gave them their final commission, 'He said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day; and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations.'

Plainly then this was to be the order of Christian preaching among all nations—repentance first, and upon it remission of sins. And plainly this was the order observed by the Apostles in their preaching. When at Pentecost so many were touched with conviction and compunction, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the Apostles, 'Men and brethren, what shall we do?' Peter said unto them, 'Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.' And lastly, when St. Paul, the great Apostle of us Gentiles, reminded the Ephesian elders how he had taught them publicly, and from house to house, what does he say had been the substance and order of his teaching? 'Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.'

We see, then, from the whole of Scripture, that God has ever been in one mind on this important

matter, and therefore He is in the same mind now. He calls us to repentance prior to forgiveness: He calls us to forsake sin, and set ourselves to do right; or else we have no access to the cleansing blood of Christ. Our Lord Jesus Christ 'gave Himself a ransom for all,' a ransom sufficient for all, and open to all. 'The fountain for sin and for uncleanness,' opened in His side, is copious enough, and of virtue enough, to wash from their pollution the whole family of man, if they plunged themselves into it. But they may not plunge themselves into it, it is not open to them, unless they are penitent, unless they renounce their known sins, and honestly set themselves to discharge their known duties both to God and man. Christ did not come to be the minister of sin, nor encourage men to go on in it, under the notion that His atonement would still cover their presumptuous sins, and screen them at last from God's anger and punishment. His atonement will screen none who knowingly live in sin. His atonement is not available to those who continue to sin wilfully. For any of us to suppose that 'we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,' while we persist in evil courses, is a dangerous delusion, a delusion which Christ Himself has done all that He could to prevent or destroy. If men are 'workers of iniquity' under any pretence whatever, He declares He 'will protest unto them in the last day that He never knew

them, and that they must depart from Him.' And He instructed His Apostles to declare with equal plainness that 'without holiness no man shall see the Lord.' Therefore all pretended reliance on the atoning blood of Christ is both presumptuous and vain in those who, all the while, are living in habits of sin. It is indeed 'a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners:' but then He came to save them from their sins, not in them; He came to call sinners to repentance first, in order to their salvation.

So let us lay these general truths to heart with regard to ourselves in particular. If any of us are conscious of living in sin—I mean, if any of us know we are in the habit of doing what we are aware is wrong, or leaving undone what we are aware is right and our bounden duty—then God does not accept us in our present state of mind and conduct, and never will while they continue such. Like the Jews of old we may 'have a form of godliness,' and 'seem to be religious;' may attend public worship and sacraments; we may 'make many prayers,' and do many things of a specious devotional kind. But if, all the while, we indulge an evil temper and an evil tongue; if we deceive, defraud, or oppress our neighbour, whether through wilfulness or negligence; if we are selfish, unkind, uncharitable, not really 'fearing God or regarding

men;' all our religion is vain. God will no more accept us, as we are, than He accepted the formal Israelites in Isaiah's time. On the contrary, as He said to them so He says to us, 'Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow; and then come, and we will reason together, and confer about pardon and peace: but not till then.'

While we continue perversely sinful and impenitent God has nothing to say to us on the subject of forgiveness. He has no forgiveness for us while we are stout-hearted, and bent on evil. So long as we are in that wilful and wicked frame of mind, we may not avail ourselves of the blood of Christ, nor obtain the benefit of His atonement. None may lay his hand on the head of the Lamb of God who does not also stand before Him as a sincere penitent, and confess his sins with purpose of heart to forsake and amend them. Therefore let us think of this, that it may cut off from us all false hope of being 'accepted in the Beloved,' and that it may make us very sure that we must repent or perish.

But when the word of God thus shuts up all avenues to life except one, it is that we may press to that one the more eagerly. And what that one avenue is the Scripture leaves us in no doubt. It

speaks of 'repentance unto life:' 'then hath God to the Gentiles also granted repentance unto life.' We see repentance opens the door to life. Are we penitent? Then immediately ours are the promises connected with the text: 'Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.' This is figurative language; but the thing meant is declared elsewhere, with all possible plainness, in these gracious words: 'Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, and he will abundantly pardon.' So then, while God reveals Himself as 'a consuming fire' to the workers of iniquity, He not less reveals Himself as 'a pardoning God' to those 'who turn from transgression in Jacob.' That atonement of Christ, which is of no avail 'to them that offend of malicious wickedness,' becomes of immediate and perfect avail to sincere penitents. If we are sincere penitents, then shame and sorrow for our past sins against God and man will make us abhor them now, and strive against them hereafter. We shall 'eschew evil, and do good;' and if this be the spirit of our mind and the tenor of our conduct, 'there will be no condemnation' to us.

St. John brings us with all clearness this comforting message from God: 'If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one

with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.' More need not, more cannot, be said to encourage us to repentance. Therefore let us all 'think on our ways, and turn our feet unto God's testimonies: let us make haste, and delay not the time to keep His commandments.' And may His good Spirit help our infirmities, and indeed grant to each and all of us 'repentance unto life.'

II.

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF PRIVILEGES.

'And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard. What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? Wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?'—Isa. v. 3, 4.

WE observe from the Scriptures that Parables were made use of to convey religious instruction long before our Lord Jesus Christ came in the flesh. He, however, then made the most frequent use of them, because they were the best suited to His particular circumstances and purpose. A parable is 'a dark speech,' in which more is meant than meets the ear. A parable contains hidden wisdom, which can be got at only by attention and thought. A parable is like a nut with a hard shell, but a kernel inside to reward those who will be at the pains to crack it, but send empty away those who will not take the pains. And this was the great reason why Christ employed it so much. He spoke in parables on purpose to try those who heard Him, and prove what manner of spirit they were of. If they were careless or captious, they

missed His meaning; but if they were honest and earnest, they caught it.

Sometimes, also, it was not safe, and at other times not expedient, for Him to speak otherwise than by a parable. In certain cases, if what He said in parables He had said in plain words, He would have been stoned, or in some way murdered before His time, by the chief priests and scribes; and in other cases, it was only by a parable that He could draw from His hearers such an honest opinion and impartial verdict as He wanted for their conviction. For example, when He had spoken the parable about the vineyard let out to husbandmen, who, instead of rendering the lord of the vineyard its fruit in the season, beat his servants and slew his son, and put the question, 'What, therefore, shall the lord of the vineyard do unto them when he cometh?' and they said, 'He shall miserably destroy those wicked husbandmen, and shall let out the vineyard to others;' this was an answer which He would never have drawn from them, if they had been aware at the moment He had spoken the parable against them. But they were not aware of it, and so gave an honest opinion, though against themselves; just as David did about the rich man who had taken the poor man's lamb.

And we see the Lord's object was the same, when by Isaiah He employed the parable to which the text refers. He had said, 'My beloved hath a

vineyard on a very fruitful hill, and he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a winepress therein, and he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes.' This was the parable setting forth in figurative language how well he had done to his vineyard, and what an ill return it had made him: upon which He puts the question of the text, 'And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard. What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it?' They were obliged in conscience to allow that nothing more could reasonably have been done in it. Then, if so, 'wherefore, when he looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?' Was this the return it ought properly to have made Him for all his outlay, and pains, and care? Certainly not. The case was plain. A vineyard so planted and so tended ought to have brought forth something much better than wild grapes. Then a tacit acknowledgment of this kind made way for the Lord's application of the parable. 'The vineyard of the Lord of hosts was the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant.' God gave His Jewish Church great privileges and advantages above all the rest of the world; and,

therefore, He reasonably expected from them that superior good conduct which, to His regret, He did not find. 'He looked for judgment, but behold oppression; and for righteousness, but behold a cry.' This oppression, and violence, and iniquitous behaviour, in a variety of ways were the 'wild grapes,' which were a very unsuitable and improper return to the Lord for all His mercies, instead of the good grapes of integrity, justice, loving-kindness, and charity. He, therefore, most reasonably complained of His vineyard, and expressed His displeasure at His ungrateful people, declaring what we know He fulfilled, that their privileges should be taken from them, and that they should be visited with heavier punishment than other people, because they had enjoyed and abused greater advantages. Now these things were written for our learning and for our warning. St. Paul says so in his eleventh chapter to the Romans. Having shown how the Jews had been rejected for their sins, he turns to any Gentile, disposed to exult over them, and says, 'Thou standest by faith. Be not high-minded but fear. For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee. Behold, therefore, the goodness and severity of God; on them which fell, severity; but towards thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness; otherwise thou also shalt be cut off.'

As Christians we have succeeded to more than

the privileges and advantages of the ancient Jews: hence we have succeeded also to more than their responsibility; and from the above language of St. Paul it is plain, that what befell the Jews God intended us Christians to take as a lesson and caution to ourselves. We ought, therefore, very seriously to consider the religious blessings we enjoy, and what sort of return we personally are making to God for our enjoyment of them.

Let us accordingly consider, first, some of the religious blessings which we enjoy. I say religious blessings, foremost and in particular, because these are the most important and distinguishing. We are, indeed, very much indebted to Almighty God for many temporal mercies which we are favoured with in our land, and in our circumstances, above the vast majority of our fellow-creatures. But our spiritual advantages are our great advantages, because they belong to the soul and to eternity. These were the advantages with which the Jews were especially favoured, of which God thought so much. He says to them, 'You only have I known of all the families of the earth.' 'I have given you my statutes, and showed you my judgments, which if a man do, he should live in them.'

In those days He did not deal so with any other nation, neither had the heathen knowledge of His laws. Now, 'that the soul be without knowledge, it is not good.' 'People are destroyed for lack of

spiritual knowledge.' Whence 'it is life eternal to know the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent.' And this opportunity of gaining eternal life through the knowledge of the truth the Jews had, and St. Paul justly considered it the grand advantage which they had. He says, 'What advantage hath the Jew? and what profit of circumcision?' And he answers, 'Much every way; chiefly because that unto them were committed the oracles of God.' In having 'the oracles of God' they had access to 'eternal life.' 'Search the Scriptures,' said our Lord, 'for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of me.' Those 'oracles of God' Timothy had 'searched,' and had found in them that 'eternal life,' of which they contained the secret. 'From a child,' says the Apostle to him, 'thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus.' And what the Scriptures did for Timothy they were competent to do for the Jews in general, and no doubt did for many of them besides Timothy. And there are no other writings, besides the Holy Scriptures, which can 'show unto man the way of salvation.' That truth of God, which is the means, in the hand of the Spirit, for enlightening, sanctifying, and saving the soul of man, is deposited in the sacred volume, and nowhere else. Hence the possession and free perusal of the Holy Scriptures is

unquestionably man's most important privilege, and, rightly improved, may become his greatest blessing. But if the Jews were so privileged in possessing the Old Testament, a part only of the sacred volume, what shall we think of our privilege in having the sacred volume complete—in having not only the Old Testament, but also the key to it in the New—in having 'the everlasting gospel' of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, in all its fulness and in all its glory?

Well may we say in our Church Collect, 'Blessed Lord, who hast caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning.' We have, indeed, cause to bless Him for conferring this benefit upon us, because in these Scriptures is set before us 'the blessed hope of everlasting life.' With these Scriptures we have been more or less acquainted even from our childhood. We have heard them with our ears; we have, most of us, read them with our eyes; we have had them explained to us, and enforced on us, in public and in private; and along with them we have had various other ordinances of God and means of grace, the best calculated of anything in the world to impress and save us. And not only so, but we have had grace itself given to us in different degrees: we have had the Spirit of God actually 'striving with us' in our consciences, through His word, through His ministry, and

through many wonderful providences which have befallen us, both of a joyful and of a painful kind. God has been very 'nigh to us, about our bed, and about our path.' He has, as it were, 'laid his hand upon us,' and 'sought to guide us with his counsel,' and 'our ears have, as it were, heard his word behind, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when we were turning to the right hand, or turning to the left.' I suppose there are none present but are conscious that God has, at different times, wrought upon them, and drawn them, sometimes through their hopes, sometimes through their fears; and drawn them towards Himself, and drawn them as strongly perhaps as was consistent with their liberty and free choice. In short, if God were to do what I cannot do, viz. set clearly before each of us how much He has 'done for our souls,' there can be little doubt He might justly address to all of us the awakening question of the text, 'What could have been done more for my vineyard, that I have not done in it?' What could reasonably have been done more to us, without putting upon us a degree of force which would have destroyed our free agency, and, therefore, our capacity for either reward or punishment?

Then, if our religious privileges and advantages have been so many and great as they have been, even to the least privileged among us in our favoured

land, we certainly ought also to consider, in conclusion, what kind of return we personally are making to God for our enjoyment of them.

We cannot deny the justice of His complaint against His favoured Jewish vineyard: 'Wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?' As much as to say, 'I looked for better produce than that, after all my pains and care.' We see then that God does not bestow spiritual blessings upon us, and remain indifferent about their effect. 'He looketh upon men,' and looketh for a return from men of some portion of that loving-kindness which He so largely bestows on them. He looks for His vines to bring forth grapes, good grapes; and for His fig-trees to bring forth figs, good figs. In the New Testament parable He says to the dresser of His vineyard, 'Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree, and find none.' Considering, therefore, that we have been 'planted in the house of the Lord, and have been flourishing, perhaps many years, in the courts of the house of our God,' it is certain He must have been looking to us to have brought forth the fruit of good living, to the praise and glory of His grace.

And now the question is, Whether we have indeed brought forth 'good grapes,' of the description above named, or whether we have brought forth only 'wild grapes?' 'Wild grapes,' you should

understand, mean, not simply poor grapes, inferior to what they might have been by cultivation, as a crab is inferior to an apple, or a sloe to a plum; but 'wild grapes' mean, in scripture language, false, bad, poisonous grapes. This appears from the passage in 2 Kings, iv., where it says, 'One went out into the field to gather herbs,' for the sons of the prophets, 'and found a wild vine, and gathered thereof his lapful, and unconsciously threw these wild grapes into the pot:' but the moment the mistake was discovered, 'they cried out, saying, O thou man of God, there is death in the pot!' 'Wild grapes,' then, are not merely unpleasant, but noxious grapes. Hence they are properly explained to mean, not merely conduct that was of no use, but conduct that was mischievous, injurious, and oppressive, the opposite of what was helpful and righteous. 'I looked for judgment, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry.'

In all ages of the Church there have been those who 'have turned the grace of God into licentiousness,' 'having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof,' and living in sins which brought discredit on the very name of religion. We ought, then, to examine ourselves, and think what our manner of life is under the spiritual advantages we enjoy. If any of us live in a wild and thoughtless manner, and still more if we corrupt ourselves by

'evil communications' and wrong behaviour, there can be no doubt that such of us bring forth 'wild grapes,' and greatly offend God by so doing. It was not for this He caused us to be born in a Christian land, and gave us Christian advantages. It was not for this He daily loads us with benefits, and 'gives us richly all things to enjoy.' Especially it was not for this He gave us the knowledge of salvation through our suffering Redeemer. Christ died for our sins, that we might die to them; and if we will not die to them, we must at last die for them ourselves, with no benefit from the death of Christ, but rather with sorer punishment for having 'trampled under foot the Son of God,' and 'neglected His great salvation.' Let us hear Him, and fear, and avoid falling into aggravated condemnation and ruin by abusing our Christian privileges, and living unchristian lives.

Let us pray God to impress our hearts with a salutary warning from the sins and sorrows of the Jews; and as we have clearer light and knowledge, and greater helps and stronger motives to holy living, than any persons had in Isaiah's time, let it be our endeavour to render unto God our Saviour in some humble measure, according to the benefits done unto us, and plentifully bring forth the fruit of good works. 'Herein,' said Christ, 'is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit: so shall ye be my disciples.' Let us aim 'to walk worthy

of him, who calls us to his kingdom and glory;' that having been 'trees of righteousness,' laden with the fruit of grace in this nether world, we may, in His good time, be transplanted to flourish for ever in the Paradise of God.

III.

THE CHARACTER OF JOHN THE BAPTIST.

'He was a burning and a shining light.'—
John, v. part of ver. 35.

SUCH was the high and honourable testimony borne by our Lord to His forerunner. Let me first illustrate the justness of the character here given of John; and this will lead us to consider how far we are partakers of his radiance, and ourselves luminous in understanding and fervent in spirit. Our Lord's attestation to the Baptist is twofold—as to what he was in himself, and as to what he was to others. In himself he was 'a burning light,' and to others he was 'a shining light:' *i. e.* he was blest, and a blessing; a good man, and doing good: at once a possessor and a minister of the grace of God. We will consider him briefly in both these respects in order.

1st. John was 'a burning light,' personally blest with heavenly illumination and grace. The angel's promise to his father Zacharias was, 'He shall be filled with the Holy Ghost from his mother's womb.'

And this promise was strikingly fulfilled in his intelligence and piety even before he left that womb. 'For as soon as the voice of Mary's salutation sounded in his mother's ears he leaped in her womb for joy;' thereby testifying, in the most lively and wondrous manner, how well he knew that Saviour whom she carried, and how he exulted in Him. When, therefore, he possessed such light and grace, even before he was born, we cannot be surprised that after his birth it is added, 'The child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and the hand of the Lord was with him.'

Yes, 'the hand of the Lord was with him,' moulding him into 'a prophet,' yea, and 'into much more than a prophet,' into an accomplished 'messenger to go before the face of the Lord, and prepare His ways.' Accordingly when, in his thirtieth year, he came forth 'preaching in the wilderness of Judæa,' he was indeed 'a burning light,' full of wisdom in his understanding, and of devotedness in his affections. The wisdom of his answers and exhortations was so great that 'the people were in suspense, and all men mused of him in their hearts whether he were the Christ or not.' Upon which his devotedness to his Lord eminently appeared. For, no sooner was he aware of the popular opinion and feeling in his favour, than, instead of availing himself of it, as an ambitious or vain man would have done, for purposes of self-aggrandisement, he imme-

diately renounced his own glory, and 'sought His glory who had sent him.' 'He answered, saying unto them all, I indeed baptize you with water: but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose; He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire.'

Now when we recollect how very great was the Baptist's celebrity—how 'Jerusalem and all Judæa and all the region round about Jordan' had gone out to him and paid him the utmost deference—and when we know how soul-seducing popular applause is apt to be—we shall acknowledge that John's behaviour on this occasion was a beautiful proof of his humility, and piety, and devotion to Christ. And these feelings, so decisively the produce of divine grace, he continued to possess and display under circumstances still more trying. For when Jesus had appeared, and made more disciples than John, and the Jews, seemingly with the view of mortifying the Baptist, 'came and said unto him, Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou bearest witness, behold the same baptizeth, and all men come to him,' John, so far from showing any dissatisfaction or envy, gave this generous reply, 'A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven. Ye yourselves bear me witness that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him. He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the

bridegroom, that standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy, therefore, is fulfilled. He must increase; but I must decrease.' Nothing could be more expressive of the Baptist's devotedness to his Lord than such words under such circumstances.

Other proofs of his wisdom and piety might easily be added; but the above are amply sufficient to illustrate the justness with which our Saviour pronounced him to have been 'a burning light,' truly possessed of heavenly intelligence and goodness. Nor was he less deservedly pronounced to have been 'a shining light,' *i. e.* a man not only enlightened himself, but beaming for the benefit of others—'a candle put,' not 'under a bushel' of secrecy, or 'a bed' of retirement, but 'on a candlestick' of publicity, and 'giving light to all that were in the house.' The great purpose for which he was set up, and which he faithfully answered, was to light men to Christ. He was (to change the figure) 'the morning star,' brilliant indeed, yet shining not by his own light, but by light derived from that 'Sun of righteousness,' of whose rising he was the harbinger, and in whose splendour, when risen, he delighted to merge himself and disappear. Such is the account given of him by his namesake the Apostle: 'There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him

might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.' Therefore, though John was 'a shining light,' it was in borrowed rays, and only 'for a season.' However, during that season, and while Christ had not as yet appeared, the Baptist did shine brilliantly: but as not of himself, so not for himself: He shone from Christ and for Christ. His great object and endeavour was, to announce that Christ was coming, 'to make ready a people prepared for Him,' and, as soon as He showed Himself, to point Him out, and say, 'Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.' And what is more, he so pointed Him out with the express view of causing his own disciples to follow Him; and he succeeded in causing them to do so. 'John stood, and two of his disciples; and looking upon Jesus as He walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God! And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus.' One of the disciples was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. And he 'first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messias, which is, being interpreted, the Christ; and he brought him to Jesus.' Thus speedily were two, if not three, chief Apostles directed to Christ, through the instrumentality of the enlightened and faithful Baptist: and from this specimen we may judge

with what zeal and success he brought numbers more to the true knowledge and reception of their Saviour. He was, then, in the justest sense, 'a burning and a shining light'—blest and a blessing—a good man and doing good—at once a possessor and a minister of the grace of God; which indeed was bestowed on him so abundantly, and so not in vain, that the Saviour's expression concerning him is, in the original, even more emphatic, importing that he was pre-eminently 'the burning and the shining light;' which he certainly was of lights which had arisen upon the dark world up to that time. He was not only a prophet, but the greatest of prophets; he was not only a star, but the day-star, 'brightest and best of the sons of the morning,' and knowing no superior except the sun.

Now, therefore, let us proceed to the main consideration, which is, how far we are partakers of his radiance, and ourselves luminous in understanding and fervent in spirit. The great use of John was, as an example and witness of the grace of Christ—an example by his life, and a witness by his doctrine. We see in him what a holy, self-denying, and useful life a person will lead under the influence of the grace of Christ. By nature, John was as sinful, selfish, and unprofitable as any of us: but how pious and devoted did he become by grace! Grace visited and filled his heart, even from his earliest existence; and by that grace he

was what he was. He had Christ revealed in him while he was yet an unborn babe.

Paul had the same revealed in him when he was of mature age, and then he too became 'a burning and a shining light.' So it is grace that makes the grand difference between one person and another. 'That which is born of the flesh is flesh,' whether it be an infant or an adult; and 'that which is born of the Spirit is spirit,' whether it be a John or a Paul. If the Spirit of Christ be really in a person, of whatever age, he will glorify Christ; and no man can say that Jesus is the Lord but by the Holy Ghost.' It is divine teaching, and it only, which inclines and enables men to 'receive Christ Jesus the Lord,' and to 'magnify their Saviour openly.' He Himself said, 'It is written in the prophets, They shall be all taught of God: every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me.' Accordingly we see in heaven-taught John the most lively attachment and devotedness to Christ—the deepest reverence for His Person, and the most disinterested and self-denying efforts to promote His glory. In these respects the Baptist is a bright example to all of us, and we shall do well to consider how far we have followed it. What think we of Christ? Do our feelings of veneration for His Person, and of ardour in His service, at all resemble those of John? These points should be especially considered by

any of us who, by Divine permission, are in the ministry of the same Lord Jesus. We ought, in a peculiar degree, to be emptied of self, and to seek His glory that sent us. Let us look, then, each within his own bosom, and see how much of the Baptist's love and zeal is burning there.

If the Spirit of Christ which was in John be in us also, it will assuredly have produced in us feelings toward Christ of the same kind which it did in John. Nothing is more distinctive of a minister 'born of the Spirit,' and 'sent from God,' than lowly views of self, and exalted, affectionate, and adoring thoughts of the great Redeemer. If any of us are 'vain in our imaginations,' conceited of what we are or what we do, and 'lightly esteem the Rock of our salvation,' such of us have never seen His glory and our own corruptions, and 'our foolish heart is darkened.' Such of us are ill prepared to 'preach' among our people 'the unsearchable riches of Christ,' and to 'labour much in the Lord.' Such of us need 'the eyes of our understanding to be enlightened,' and our heart to be touched with a humility and gratitude as yet unknown to us; and we cannot pray too earnestly to 'the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all grace,' that He, who alone is able by His Spirit, would be pleased to 'reveal His Son in us,' that we may 'taste and see how gracious He is.'

But if, on the other hand, He is already precious to us; if 'our soul doth magnify the Lord, and our spirit rejoice in God our Saviour;' if, at the same time that we endeavour to serve Him faithfully, we deeply feel our unworthiness to do Him the smallest service; this is a sure sign that the holy flame, which burnt so brightly in John, has been kindled in us also. Without the interposition of divine grace we could not appreciate 'the Lord of glory,' nor feel an admiring and grateful attachment to Him; nor could we mortify our natural sin and selfishness, nor live a laborious and exemplary life, with a desire to 'adorn His doctrine in all things,' and 'win souls' to Him. So if we have become, in any degree, luminous in understanding and fervent in spirit, 'this hath God wrought,' and we have to thank Him for putting in our lamp some of that oil of grace by which the Baptist of old became 'a burning light.'

But he was also, as we observed, 'a shining light:' an example, not only of what the grace of Christ did in him, but also of what a person, and especially a minister, may and will do by the grace of Christ. Deeply sensible of the Saviour's value to himself, John's great object was to bring others savingly acquainted with His value. And this he aimed to accomplish in the only sound, safe, and successful way, viz. by showing them their need of a Saviour, and the all-sufficiency of Christ to meet

their wants. In vain is a Saviour set before those who are dead in sins or in self-righteousness. The former cannot see Him, and the latter do not feel their want of Him. This John knew. Therefore, when he would 'prepare a people for his Lord,' he came first preaching to them the necessity of repentance. But why should they repent of what they were not convinced was wrong? Hence John set himself to show them distinctly wherein they were wrong. He brought his light to bear upon their ways of darkness,—'Whatsoever doth make manifest is light.' John, therefore, opened to the different ranks and classes of the community their duties respectively, showed them what manner of persons they ought to be, convicted them by their own consciences that they were not such, awakened in them feelings of shame, and compunction, and religious concern, and hence led them to see their urgent need of a Saviour from past sins, and of the grace of His Holy Spirit to avoid sin in future.

Now this is the right way in which to preach repentance—to show people that they have real and great cause to repent—to show them that, however God may have 'winked at the times of their ignorance,' now that their sinfulness is flashed upon them He 'commands them to repent,' and to show them that there is a Saviour 'at hand, and not far off,' to whom, if they will sincerely betake

themselves in faith and prayer, He will 'give them repentance and forgiveness of sins,' and grace to be better in time to come. Thus did John preach repentance; thus did he humble sinful men, and then point them to the Lamb of God that they might be 'justified by faith,' and, being baptized by Him 'with the Holy Ghost and with fire,' might themselves become, in their respective stations, 'burning and shining lights.'

In these respects the Baptist is a wonderfully clear and safe guide to us who have now 'to preach unto the people.' We must preach to them distinctly their fallen, defective, sinful, and guilty state. All scripture is but the iteration, and amplification, and application of the affecting words, 'The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which is lost.' Nothing can be more certain than that all men are naturally lost—'very far gone from original righteousness.' Hence we must press upon them 'repentance toward God,' showing them, in particulars, what abundant cause they have to 'repent them truly.' In other words, we must preach the Law, remembering it is God's own instrument in the hands of the Spirit for producing conviction of sin, rising superior to the idle clamour that our office is to 'preach the Gospel.' So it is; but our gospel must comprise the Law, if we would preach it 'lawfully.' John went before Jesus, and the Law must go before the Gospel. Indeed, the

Gospel is no gospel except as it comes after the Law. We truly act the part of John to our people, and lead them to Christ, when we point out to them their duties clearly and fully, burden their minds with the feeling that they have not done them, and trouble their hearts with the discovery that they cannot do them, and yet are condemned in leaving them undone. It is thus, if anyhow, they come to 'labour and be heavy laden'—a state of mind certainly 'not joyous' in itself, 'but grievous,' yet useful and hopeful, because, when they 'feel oppressed, they may be glad of Christ to undertake for them.'

Never, therefore. let us shrink from the charge of being 'their enemies, because we tell them the truth.' If we were indeed their enemies, we should 'speak unto them smooth things,' we should 'prophesy deceits.' But as we love them, we shall warn them; and as we see them in danger, we shall point them to the right way of escape. We shall show them 'the terror of the Lord,' alarm them with the fears of hell, and make the consciousness of their corruptions and the remembrance of their sins afflict them as much as possible. In short, we shall not hesitate being to them for awhile as rough as the hairy Baptist, stern and severe 'preachers of righteousness,' with axe in hand to cut away from them all false reliances, and clear their way to the only true ground of peace.

And then, if through the power of the Holy Ghost they be but brought to real repentance, to 'sorrow after a godly sort,' we shall not be long in doing for them the other of the Baptist's blessed offices, in pointing them to 'the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world.' We shall gladly cease being a John to them, and transfer them to Jesus; and, as under-shepherds, help them to follow Him, 'who will lead them beside still waters, and convert their soul, and lead them forth in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.' As true ministers, we shall not desire they should be our disciples, but Christ's disciples. It were a poor and a guilty thing to attach them, or seek to attach them, to ourselves, to bear our name, and swell our party, and flatter our vanity. So did not John. When he had done on his disciples the work of preparation, he 'had no greater joy' than in uniting them to that Saviour who alone could make them 'fruitful in every good work.' In this again he was a bright example to any of us who 'watch for souls.' We are not to seek our own honour, but our Master's honour, and the welfare of our charge. We should be traitors to Him and to them if we sought to attach them to us, and to our way of thinking, instead of seeking to attach them to Christ and to the truth. We are, professedly, 'ministers of Christ.' Our office is to minister Him to our people, to set Him before

them, to serve Him up to them, as it were, 'to be their spiritual food and sustenance.' We are 'not to preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves our people's servants for Jesus' sake.'

At a feast, who thinks of the servants instead of the entertainment? or what servants expect themselves to be attended to instead of the dainties? No more should we ministers expect ourselves to be attended to instead of that Christ whom we serve up for the strengthening and refreshing of our people's souls! If we did expect such attention from them, they ought not to gratify our wrong desire, and St. Paul will be 'a swift witness against them' if they do. When the Corinthians were inclined to give such honour to him he said, 'Was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?' No, Christ was crucified, and Christ must 'bear the glory;' and Paul and John were alike jealous that He should bear it. Those 'holy and humble men of heart' shrank from taking to themselves any portion of their Master's honour. They shrank from it, as from sacrilege; and by their bright example they have instructed all their successors in the ministry to say, 'Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give the praise.'

'Christ is all' at last; we are nothing, except for a little while. It is enough for us, if we have the pleasure of 'presenting you as a chaste virgin

to Christ.' That you should be taken up with your heavenly bridegroom is well: you ought to be so; and we are not His friends if we would desire it otherwise. Should we be honest to attempt distracting the attentions of His bride? or would you be faithful to suffer us? Provided you have been led to your Saviour and are happy in Him, our end is answered, and we should be content to be overlooked and forgotten. If we have in us the spirit of John, it will not grieve us to sink into insignificance before the Lord. What has the day-star to do but fade when the sun is risen and the day is come? And who regrets the star that sees the sun? So, if any of you 'have received Christ Jesus the Lord,' He will 'supply all your wants out of his own fulness in glory.' Your ministers may fade and disappear, but you are not dependent on them. You 'walk in the light of the Lord.'

In conclusion, then, let us learn, from the case of John, at once the value and insignificance of us 'lesser lights who rule the night' in the Church. If we light our people's steps 'till the day dawn' we are useful; but we are not the sun. We may be honoured to guide them to Christ; but we soon vanish, and they must not depend on us. John was 'a burning and a shining light' in his time, but where is he now? and where would his disciples have been had they depended on him? But while he had the opportunity he led them to Christ,

and He has never left them nor forsaken them. While they lived they had the light of His countenance, which was good; and when they died they went to be with Him, which was far better. 'Cease, therefore, from man, whose breath is in his nostrils; for wherein is he to be accounted of?' Yea, let us all seek to have 'the Lord for our everlasting light, and our God our glory.' Through His grace, sought and derived from Him in prayer, we may all, whether laity or clergy, burn with piety and shine with usefulness, 'as lights in the world,' for a little while, in our little circlet here below; and if we do so faithfully, and our Lord testify to that effect over our departed spirit, then, by-and-by, 'to him that had shall more be given, and he shall have abundance,' and 'the righteous shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.'

IV.

MUTUAL CONSIDERATENESS.

'They came unto John, and said unto him, Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold, the same baptizeth, and all men come to him.'—John, iii. 26.

THE John here spoken of is John the Baptist. He is called 'the Baptist' by way of eminence, on account of the great sensation and impression which his preaching made, and the vast number of persons who came forward to be baptized as his disciples. We read, 'There went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judæa, and all the region round about Jordan, and were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins.' St. Luke adds emphatically, that 'multitudes came forth to be baptized of him.'

Indeed his success and fame were so great that the Evangelist even says, 'The people were in expectation (or suspense), and all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ or not.' A higher tribute to his general reputation could not have been paid. For some time he was the leading celebrity of the nation. All eyes were attracted toward him, persons of all ranks flocked

to his baptism, and he was in the most commanding position of honour and influence. But when he was in the height of his popularity and fame, 'then cometh Jesus unto Jordan to be baptized of him.' And no sooner had He appeared than the tide of popularity began to ebb from John and flow in toward Jesus. After His baptism and temptation, 'he returned in the power of the Spirit from Jordan, and there went out a fame of him through all the region round about; and he taught in their synagogues, being glorified of all.' He now soon 'made and baptized more disciples than John.' It is true He did not Himself baptize; but His disciples did for Him, and baptized into His name; and so His followers presently became more numerous than those of John. Here, then, would be a great trial of John's humility, and of his goodness and sweetness of disposition. And there were not lacking mischievous persons, who soon came to see how the Baptist would bear the waxing fame of Jesus and his own waning popularity. We read in the text, 'They came unto John, and said unto him, Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou bearest witness, behold, the same baptizeth, and all men come to him.'

Thus they naughtily tried 'what manner of spirit John was of,' and evidently sought to awaken in him feelings of jealousy toward Jesus, as now supplanting him. And no doubt it was a natural

trial to John, to see himself beginning to be cast into the shade before the brightness of the rising of his competitor. The Baptist was 'a man of like passions with ourselves:' and we all know, by our own feelings, that it is not naturally agreeable to us, where we have long shone as the chief luminary, there suddenly to be eclipsed. Most probably the Jews, who brought to John this glowing report of Christ's rapidly increasing celebrity, did so with the view of annoying the Baptist at the contrast of his own inferiority, and of making him express his annoyance. But if they had any such artful and wicked purpose, they must have been wonderfully disappointed and reproved by his reply.

'John answered them and said, A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven. Ye yourselves bear me witness that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him. He that hath the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy, therefore, is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease. He that cometh from above is above all. He that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth. He that cometh from heaven is above all.' These noble words effectually put an end to any foolish notion that John could be touched with jealousy of his Lord and Master. John knew both that

Lord and Master and himself far too well to think of instituting any comparison, much less any rivalry, between the two. The Baptist was thoroughly aware that he himself, whatever honour might for awhile have been put upon him, was, after all, a mere child of earth; whereas his Master was 'the Lord from heaven.' It was right that the Lord should have the affection and homage which were due to His great Name; and John loved his Master with a love far too true and single not to rejoice in the devotion, the increasing devotion, of the Church to her glorious Bridegroom. In vain, therefore, did these mischief-making Jews seek to render him jealous of his Lord. He was utterly superior to any such little, unbecoming, and wrong feeling. His feeling was all the other way. He took an honest and irrepressible delight in seeing his Master increase, and in merging his own poor rays in his Master's brightness. All this was excellent feeling and behaviour on the part of John; and now let us remark how it was taken notice of, and appreciated, on the part of Christ. 'From him no secrets are hid.' Accordingly we find He 'perceived in His spirit' the use which the Jews were making of His growing fame, and how basely they were trying by means of it to afflict His faithful Forerunner, and, if possible, awake in his pious bosom sentiments of envy and of discontent.

He immediately determined, therefore, that His

generous servant should not continue exposed to a trial which unquestionably was severe, and from the severity of which he might be screened. The trying thing was, that Christ should not only have come into 'the region of Judæa round about Jordan,' the original scene of John's ministry and success, but should have remained there, and gathered disciples there, and gathered them, in not a few cases, from the Baptist's own followers. Jesus did not conceal from Himself that such a proceeding was really trying to John, trying to his natural man, with whatever piety his spiritual man might and did magnanimously rejoice in his Lord's increase; and He was resolved not to be outdone in generosity. If John was considerate for His glory, He would not be less considerate for His servant's feelings. Hence arose the proceeding so remarkably narrated in the opening of the fourth chapter of our Evangelist,—'When, therefore, the Lord knew how the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John, he left Judæa, and departed again into Galilee.' He would not allow unpleasant comparisons to be drawn by evil people between Himself and His noble-minded Forerunner. 'He therefore left Judæa,' the scene of John's triumphs, to be occupied by the Baptist, and by him alone, during the short time yet before him ere he should be 'shut up in prison,' 'and he departed again into Galilee,' which was

many miles away, and where He might exercise His ministry, and gather disciples, and have them baptized, without so much as seeming to trespass on His good servant, and come into any sort or degree of competition with him. And this conduct of our Lord's was as worthy of Him as John's conduct was, in its way, worthy of him. As, on the one side, honour was shown in the most unselfish way to whom honour was due, so, on the other side, there was shown a prompt considerateness for the natural feelings of a faithful servant, such as we cannot too much admire. And the narrative gives us apt occasion, not only to remark on the beautiful spirit which thus showed itself both in John and his Lord, but also to propose it as a pattern for our own imitation.

There can be no dispute that our first duty as Christians is to seek the honour and glory of our Master Christ, even as John the Baptist did. Whatever powers and talents we have, He gave them to us; for, as John openly and most properly declared, 'a man can receive nothing,' *i.e.* nothing good and useful to himself and others, 'except it be given him from heaven.' Hence, if the station in life which we occupy is one in any degree of commanding influence, we shall bear steadfastly in mind that the Lord Christ put us in that station, with a view to our employing for Him the faculties and resources with which we may have been en-

trusted by Him. 'We are not our own; we are bought with a price,' even the price of His most precious blood, that we might be His servants, and serve Him. Hence we are bound to glorify him in our body and in our spirit, which are his.' We are not to 'seek our own,' but 'the things which are Jesus Christ's;' and if He is honoured, and His cause promoted, we are to be content. If usefulness and reputation attend us in our Christian endeavours, let Him have the praise, 'from whom alike must come our high endeavour and our glad success.' And if again we are reduced to ciphers, and shrink into insignificance, we are to be thoroughly willing that Christ should be everything and we nothing. All that is necessary is, that we should fulfil His pleasure and answer His end; and whether we do so by fame or by obscurity, by life or by death, by shining in our sphere or by being eclipsed in it, should be nothing to us. In each and in every case our motto should be, 'The will of the Lord be done.' Our grand business and duty is, to have our will brought into subjection to His, and kept in subjection to it, so as at all times, and under all circumstances, to acquiesce in His pleasure, and work for Him, as He may give us scope and opportunity.

Such, unquestionably, was the excellent spirit in which the Baptist lived, intent on using his great fame and popularity, while he had them, to bring

all around him to Christ; and willing, when they were brought, to be himself forgotten, and to rejoice in his Master's being 'all their salvation and all their desire.' And if we have grace to be thus mindful of Christ, and seek His glory, we see, by the experience of John, that we never need be afraid that Christ will be forgetful of us, or regardless of our feelings and comfort. We serve a Master who has shown Himself most considerate for His servants, and most tender of giving or causing them any umbrage or offence that could be avoided. Nothing can be plainer, or more touching, than His considerateness for John's feelings in the case on which we have now been dwelling. And He showed the same considerateness for him on a later occasion, when the poor Baptist had been long shut up in prison for faithfulness to his Master, and yet that Master had seemed to have no thought or care for His suffering servant. The Scripture says, 'Oppression maketh a wise man mad,' and Herod's oppression appears to have had some such distracting influence on the imprisoned Baptist, making him, in a moment of weakness, doubt whether Jesus was indeed that great Person that should come as the Saviour of the world, or whether another was to be looked for, who would be more gracious toward His ill-treated servants. 'When John heard in prison the works of Christ, he sent unto him two of his disciples,

saying, Art thou he that should come, or look we for another?' Jesus soon sent them back with sufficient evidence that He was indeed the Christ; and then, lest the inquiry just made in John's weakness should lead any around to think disparagingly of that good man, He immediately began to speak to the multitudes in the highest terms concerning John, and especially to declare that 'of them which had been born of women, there had not a greater prophet risen than John the Baptist.' So tender was our Lord toward His suffering servant, and so jealous of having it thought that He was unmindful of one in prison, who, when out of prison, had truly endeavoured to please and glorify Him. And we may be sure that the considerateness which our Redeemer had 'in the days of his flesh' He still retains; for 'He is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.' 'Them that honour Him He will honour, as surely as those that despise Him shall be lightly esteemed.' Hence we may rest on Him with the sure conviction, that if we honestly seek His glory He will be graciously considerate for us under all the circumstances of life, and make us 'know, in all our heart and in all our soul,' that He will not be outdone by any of us in generosity and kindness.

And lastly, while we remark the beautiful behaviour of John and Christ, we should endeavour to transfuse them into our own spirit and conduct.

Let us not listen to any evil tongues, which would fain waken in us hard thoughts of some of our Redeemer's arrangements. Rather let us have 'confidence in him in all things.' 'He is a rock, his work is perfect; all his ways are judgment; a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he.' He is 'righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works.' So therefore let us esteem Him, at least by faith, in cases where we do not at present see the reasonableness and propriety of His procedures. In due time He will justify our utmost reliance on Him, and show that we did not place it in Him in vain. And while we admire His tenderness toward John, and the gentleness with which He sought not to hurt his feelings, let us learn to be considerate ourselves for all around us, after the pattern of our great Lord and Master. Let us bear in mind that the Spirit which descended on Him descended in the form of a Dove, intimating how harmless He would be, and without offence. If we are under the influence of that Spirit, it will tell on us in the same manner. St. Paul says, 'The fruit of the Spirit is love, peace, gentleness, goodness.' May that fruit abound in our lives, and 'let us not be desirous of vain-glory, provoking one another, envying one another.'

V.

THE FATHER OF THE FAITHFUL.

'By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.'—Heb. xi. 8.

OUR attention has been called to-day to the patriarch Abraham. The thing for which he was pre-eminent, perhaps, above all men that ever lived, and the thing for which he is especially commended to us in 'the Scripture of truth,' was his faith in God. He had a wonderful trust in the Almighty, and showed that he had it by acting repeatedly as, without it, no man could or would have acted. The text records the first signal instance of his faith, and of its exertion into act. 'By faith, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, he obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.' Here are three things to be noticed,—first, his call; secondly, his obedience to it; and thirdly, the principle from which his obedience sprang.

Let us notice, first, his call. By putting together

various passages of Scripture, we gather the following information connected with his early life and call. When he was a young man, and indeed for many years afterwards, he lived 'in the east country,' in Mesopotamia, by the river Euphrates, along with his father, his wife, and his various relations and friends; and there, however strange it may seem to us now, he was an idolater, and so were all his family and connexions. And we have every reason to think he would to the end of his days have continued an idolater, but that an event happened to him something like that which afterwards happened to Moses on Mount Horeb. We read, 'The God of glory appeared to him.' We have no record of the particular manner in which God appeared to him; but this is plain, He appeared to him in such a manner as to show and satisfy him that He was indeed 'the God of glory,' the one living, true, and glorious Jehovah. And when God had given him every satisfaction as to who He was, and had laid a clear and solid ground for faith, He then called Abraham to exercise toward Him unbounded confidence. He said unto him, 'Come out from thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, into a land that I will show thee.' This was a great command; and hence it was accompanied with a great promise in case of his obedience. 'Come out of thy father's house unto a land that I will show thee; and I

will make of thee a great nation; and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: and I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.' So here was what is termed the call of Abraham.

When he was living in idolatry, ignorance, and sin, the true God, of His free love and grace, revealed Himself to him with all necessary plainness, called him 'out of the darkness' of heathenism 'into the marvellous light' of truth, and thereupon called him to forsake his old evil ways, and follow Him in a new manner into a new land, which He promised to give him, and to make him in it a blessed man.

Now, therefore, we have to notice, secondly, the way in which Abraham met the call of God. 'When he was called to go out unto a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, he obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.' But though he knew not whither he went, he knew enough abundantly to justify his going; for now he knew the Lord, and knew that that Lord had called him to go. He took, indeed, a great and difficult step; but not in the dark, nor without thorough good reason. He was neither weak in his mind nor rash in his conduct. 'He knew whom he believed.' 'The God of glory had appeared to him.' Abraham was as sure who had

come and called him, as Moses was sure, when the same Lord talked to him out of the burning bush on Horeb; or as St. Paul was sure, when the same Lord met him on his way to Damascus, and 'spoke to him.' It was, therefore, no question with Abraham whether or not he was called of God. He was quite certain he was called by Him; and the only question was, whether he was willing and resolute to obey the call. And he was willing and resolute to obey it. He forsook his native country, he gave up his old friends, he left, and left for ever, the home of his childhood. We read, 'He took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance, and all that they had gotten in Haran, and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came.' Thus Abraham promptly and thoroughly 'obeyed' God. 'He knew not, indeed, whither he went;' but he knew that he went whither he was divinely called to go; and that his duty was, not to dispute but to obey. And accordingly obey he did, at once and entirely, just as St. Paul did afterwards. 'Immediately,' says the Apostle, 'I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision.'

And now let us mark, thirdly, the principle from which he obeyed. This the text tells us with all distinctness: 'By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed.' The call was astonishing, and enough to confound his natural heart. But he had

unstaggering confidence in the wisdom and goodness of the Lord's command. He said within himself what Eli said in after times, 'It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good.' He calls me to follow Him unto a strange land. I know it not, but He knows, and I have no doubt knows it to be 'a good land and large;' and He has promised to give it me, in due season: and that is enough for me. I can trust Him with all my heart; I take Him at His word; and I willingly 'yield myself His servant to obey.' This, then, of Abraham's was indeed practical obedience. It was not mere profession, but excellent and firm conduct, founded on principle, and supported by principle all through. No doubt it cost him something. It must have cost a great deal to a man of his high character and position in society, and tender feelings, to give up persons, and places, and ways which had been naturally endeared to him from his childhood. But still, 'not fearing the reproach of men,' he gave them all up at the command of God, and for the sake and love of those better things which were revealed and promised to his faith.

And now let us consider the lesson of instruction which we may well derive from his behaviour and example. They are recorded on purpose to encourage us to a like 'obedience of faith.' We must not think that we have nothing

to do with Abraham. So far from it, there is the closest connexion between that ancient patriarch and ourselves. He was called to be 'the father of many nations;' yea, to be 'the father of all them that believe.' Hence, if we would be 'heirs of salvation,' we must personally walk in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham. We must display the same kind of conduct which he displayed, springing from the same principle. And, if you consider, our case is not so very different from his. The same 'God of glory' who appeared to him, and called him, has appeared to us also in one sense, and called us. 'The God of glory' who appeared to Abraham was in reality our Lord Jesus Christ. Twice in the New Testament He is expressly called 'the God of glory.'

Besides, it is plain from His 'appearing' to him. 'No man hath seen God (the Father) at any time.' 'He is a Spirit;' 'the King' not only 'immortal,' but 'invisible;' and the natural eyes of us human creatures are not capable of seeing Him. 'The only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father,' He hath declared Him, whenever and in whatever degrees He has revealed Himself to man. Hence it was, undoubtedly, Christ who appeared to Abraham, as He appeared to Moses and St. Paul, and made Himself known to them as their God and Saviour. We cannot tell how distinctly and fully Abraham was made acquainted with spiritual and

heavenly things; but that he was made acquainted with them is certain from our Saviour's express words to the Jews: 'Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it, and was glad.' There can, therefore, be no question that Christ revealed Himself to Abraham as God his Saviour. Abraham saw enough and was taught enough to make him set his hope on Christ, and live by faith on the Son of God, who loved him, and would in due time give Himself for him.

St. Paul says in plain words, that Christ 'preached before the gospel unto Abraham;' and Abraham understood it enough for practice, and loved it and embraced it enough for his salvation. And that gospel lifted Abraham's thoughts and hopes above any worldly good things to himself or his posterity. The real land of promise, which he understood as revealed and promised to him, and which he grasped by faith, was not the mere earthly Canaan, but 'heaven itself.' For hear what the Apostle says in the verse after our text,—'By faith Abraham sojourned in the land of promise,' *i.e.* in the earthly Canaan, 'as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise.' What promise? The next words tell us,—'For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.' And what city does that mean? It means what is elsewhere called in Scripture 'Jerusalem that is

above,' 'the heavenly Jerusalem;' it means the same thing as 'the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.' Our Article justly says, 'They are not to be heard which feign that the old fathers did look only for temporary promises.'

That Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, did look for spiritual, heavenly, everlasting blessings, is certain from this 11th of Hebrews; and this it is which so closely connects Abraham, for example, with ourselves. The revelation which was made to him is substantially the same which is made to us. 'The God of glory' who appeared to him is 'the Lord of glory' who appeared to us; not, indeed, to us personally, but to our fathers. Those very men, such as John and Peter, and James and Paul, from whom we have received the gospel, once walked and talked on this earth of ours with that 'Lord of glory.' 'The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us,' says St. John, 'and we beheld his glory; the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.' And what the Apostles saw of 'Christ the Lord,' and heard from His lips, and by His Spirit, they have made known to us in the Scriptures of the New Testament. Hence, 'blessed are our eyes, for they see,' or may see, 'the Lord of glory appearing to us,' as plainly and effectually for all enlightening and saving purposes, as even He appeared to Abraham. If we have not Abraham's advantage one way, we have

more than an equivalent another way. We have not a bodily sight of Christ; but we have a far more complete revelation of Him to the eyes of our mind; and this He, who is the best judge, pronounces to be in our favour. 'Thomas,' He said, 'because thou hast seen me thou hast believed: blessed are they which have not seen, and yet have believed.' We may, then, inherit a blessing at least as rich as that which was bestowed on Abraham and on Thomas. Christ appears to us in His word as truly and effectually as ever He did to the eyes of those good men: and as He called them to the knowledge of His truth, and, upon knowing it, called them to 'come out' from an evil world, and 'follow Him' in newness of life, so now He calls upon us to the same effect. He makes Himself known to us as 'a pardoning God.' 'God is in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them.' 'Christ became sin for us, though he knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.' Thus Christ reveals Himself to us as 'God our Saviour'—our Saviour from the guilt, the punishment, the power, and the permanency of sin—our Saviour in time, and our Saviour in eternity. Christ opens to us 'a good land and large,' better than the earthly Canaan, even 'the kingdom of heaven.' He sets before us 'the city of the Great King,' and associates in it brighter than any here below; 'the

society of just men made perfect, of an innumerable company of angels, and of God Himself to be with us, and be our God.'

So, then, there are 'exceeding great and precious promises made to us,' freely and liberally: and in consideration of these, 'the Lord of glory' calls us, as He called Abraham, to 'come out from' the sinful ways of a corrupt world, and 'be separate' in our spirit, principles, and practice; and 'there is no man,' He says, 'who shall forsake houses, or brethren, or sisters, or land, for my sake and the gospel's, but he shall receive manifold more now in this present life, and in the world to come life everlasting.' 'If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.' 'If any man will serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall my servant be. If any man serve me, him will my Father honour.' These are the calls from Christ which sound in our ears from the gospel of His grace. These are the blessings and the duties to which He invites our attention, if we wish to be saved and honoured everlastingly. And to these the attention of all present has been invited by 'the Lord of glory' again and again.

Now, therefore, we ought to bethink ourselves, which of us, like Abraham, have 'obeyed' the call of our Divine Master? Which of us 'have believed the report' of all the great things He has done and

suffered on our behalf, and of all the good things He has 'prepared for them that love Him?' Which of us, like Abraham, 'called out of darkness into marvellous light,' have 'set our love upon' that God and Saviour who calls us, and are following Him 'in pureness of living and truth' to that 'land which is very far off,' and into which 'He is gone before?'

Oh, brethren, we must look at our habitual conduct, and judge by it of the reality and strength of our faith. 'Conduct has the loudest tongue.' In vain shall we assert that we believe in Christ, if we do not obey Him. It was by 'going out from' his father's idolatrous house, and following the Lord fully, that our father Abraham proved the genuineness and power of his faith. If we have in us 'the same spirit of faith,' it will surely 'work' in us, as it wrought in him, 'by love.' We shall 'have an eye to all his commandments.' We shall 'esteem all his precepts concerning all things to be right, and all false ways we shall utterly abhor.' In a word, we shall 'live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world, looking for that blessed hope which is laid up for us in heaven, and of which we have heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel.'

VI.

THE BIRTH OF CHRIST.

'This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.'—1 Tim. i. 15.

THIS is the day on which we solemnly remember the all-important fact that 'Christ Jesus came into the world.' He may properly be considered to have 'come into the world' at the hour of His nativity. What moment, then, can be so suitable as the present for considering farther the end for which He came? This is the more necessary in order to guard you against an error into which you might be led by an improper construction put upon the language just employed. 'To come into the world' means in Scripture the same thing as to be born. Every man born is spoken of as 'coming into the world.' When, therefore, Christ Jesus was born, it might be said that was all that was meant by His 'coming into the world,' and that He only 'came into the world' like other men, out of His mother's womb, having no existence previous to that which He derived from His mother. And it is true that He had no existence as a man, previous to that

which He derived from her. But it is not true that He came into the world no otherwise than as every other man comes into it. Every other man comes into the world without choice, or intention, or design on his part. Every other man comes into the world without any purpose or condescension of his own.

But not so He whose birth we commemorate this day. 'Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.' He had an object in view, for the accomplishment of which He condescended to be born. He came into our world with an intention, with a deliberate and settled design. To have such an object, to form such a design, to cherish such an intention, He must have had an existence before He was born of Mary. It was in that previous state of existence He meditated the plan of coming into our world; and to meditate it, He must, in that previous state of existence, have been, not only a thoughtful and benevolent person, but He must have been conscious of power equal to His compassion. For Christ Jesus to conceive the resolution of 'coming into the world to save sinners,' He must have felt Himself not only willing, but 'mighty to save.' In a word, He must have felt that He was God, when He took upon Him to come into our world and deliver man. We might most justly have concluded all this from the language of the text, that 'He came into the world to save sinners.'

But it is well that conclusions so important should be seen to rest on the plainest testimony of holy writ. Observe, then, how the genuine and full import of St. Paul's expression in the text appears by comparing it with our Lord's own language. Does His Apostle say of Him, that 'He came into the world to save sinners?' What does He say of Himself? He says, 'I know whence I came.' And whence does He say He came? 'I came down from heaven.' 'I am the living bread which came down from heaven.' 'I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me.' And 'God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved.' 'I came not to judge the world, but to save the world.' 'I came into the world to bear witness unto the truth.' 'I came to call sinners to repentance.' 'I came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give my life a ransom for many.' When we consider these plain declarations of our Lord's, it is clear what interpretation we are to put upon St. Paul's language in the text; and we have also a sufficient explanation of the zeal and fervour with which he exclaimed, 'This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.'

Then, if it is 'worthy of all men to be received,' it is worthy to be received of us this day. This is

a day to be much observed as the day whereon 'the Ancient of Days' came into the world as an infant of days; as the day whereon 'the mighty God' was born to us in the city of David, 'a Saviour.' This day the 'child born,' the 'son given' to us, entered on the miseries of this sinful world, and began that course of humiliation, obedience and suffering, which was to end in the redemption of our race. That redemption was completely effected; the price was paid sufficient for the ransom of all; and now salvation through Christ is freely offered to the whole family of man.

So it is freely offered to us. To-day Christ Jesus is come afresh, as it were, into our world to save us; and the announcement of His birth for that purpose is the very thing which originally gave an impress of light and gladness to this season throughout the Christian Church—an impress which it still bears in all Christian nations, and in them alone. Go into those populous countries of the East or South, where 'darkness covers the earth and gross darkness the people,' where none 'nameth the name of Christ,' nor 'departs from iniquity,' and you will hear none of those friendly congratulations which meet us on every side. Christmas is unknown to them; and why? Because Christ is unknown to them. Neither their ears, nor the ears of their fathers, ever heard the joyful sound, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save them.

Therefore gratitude for His birth never established a festival among them, whereon 'they might alway remember the exceeding great love of their Master and only Saviour Jesus Christ,' thus 'visiting them in great humility.' But such a festival is yearly kept among ourselves, and we are keeping it at this present moment: and the evergreens that adorn our churches and our homes, and the greetings that sit upon our lips, bear witness that we profess to keep it with joy. Our national customs, then, and the very habits which we have derived from our forefathers, give yearly testimony of the strongest kind at once to our danger and deliverance, to our ruin by nature, and our redemption by grace. There is no meaning in all the joy of the present season, there never was any meaning in it, if we sinners were not on the edge of a destruction from which the Saviour's birth opened up a way of escape.

Then, since such is the meaning of our outward acknowledgment, we ought to consider how far it is the feeling of our inmost soul. What are our impressions about our sin and about our Saviour? Have we any real sorrow of heart for the former? any real gladness of heart for the latter? If not, all our keeping of Christmas is but affectation. The corruptions of the best things are commonly the worst; and this is especially true of the festivities of Christmas, as they are apt to be conducted.

How few who eat the fat and drink the sweet at this time will do it with the secret feeling, 'My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour?' Many will 'rise up early, that they may follow strong drink; and will continue until night, till the wine inflame them; and the harp and the viol, the tabret and pipe, and wine, will be in their feast: but they will not regard the work of the Lord, neither consider the operation of his hands.'

Who would think these persons are so remembering that 'Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners?' Who would think that He was born to save them from those very sins which they commit twofold more in commemoration of His birth? I hope you 'have not so learned Christ.' I hope you will not testify your joy at His birth by frustrating the design of His entering it—the very object for which He was called Jesus, 'before He was conceived in the womb:' 'Thou shalt call His name Jesus (Saviour), because he shall save his people from their sins.' 'God sent him to bless us, in turning away every one of us from our iniquities.' Our proper cause for rejoicing at this season is, not that we have the opportunity of turning to our iniquities, but that we have the means of turning from them, through the grace of Christ.

Are there, then, any of you conscious of having

hitherto lived a life of sin? If there are, let me urge such of you to pray earnestly to God your Saviour, that He would give you 'repentance and forgiveness of sins,' and the grace of His Holy Spirit to amend your lives according to His holy word. This is a favourable moment for spreading your request before Him. It is 'a good day' to-day. 'Behold, now is the accepted time: behold, now is the day of salvation.' Angels sang at His birth to-day, 'good-will towards men.' Being some of those toward whom He has good-will, destroy not His good-will by provocation and obstinacy in evil. 'Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the right way, if his wrath be kindled, yea, but a little: blessed are all they that put their trust in him.'

And you may 'put your trust in Him,' whoever of you have both a conscience of sin and compunction for it, and feel an honest shame at your past behaviour towards God, and at the way in which you were so long 'serving divers lusts and pleasures.' Remember the 'faithful saying,' so 'worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom,' you are ready to say, 'I am chief.' Ah! if it could be known that any of you add this out of a full and feeling heart, I could tell such of you that 'you are not far from the kingdom of God.' None ever entered it but with the deepest sense of their unwor-

thiness and entire dependence on the grace and power of Christ. God never works in an unnatural way, obtruding the blessings of redemption on those who are not disposed to value them. Consider, then, the state of your own desire after pardon and peace, and holiness and heaven. If you have a heart to these spiritual objects, it is a most hopeful intimation that you will some time possess them. 'Delight yourselves in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.' He came into the world, as on this day, on purpose to bestow on you the very benefits after which you pine. His commission was with an express view to the relief of persons in a state of mind like yours. His earnest, affectionate invitation is, 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you.'

Have confidence, then, in His willingness and power to refresh you from your oppressive sins and miseries. Consider that His Apostle sets forth His willingness and power to do this as 'a faithful saying.' Since it is 'a faithful saying,' have faith in it, and 'go boldly to the throne of grace, that you may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.' You want pardoning grace, sanctifying grace, saving grace: but you want not more than He is prepared to bestow. He is God's beloved Son, in whom He is always well pleased; and so now, sinful dust and ashes as you are in

yourselves, you may be 'accepted in the beloved,' and 'crowned with loving-kindnesses and tender mercies.' Are there not some of you that even now wear that crown? Are there not some of you who have a Scriptural hope that God has been 'merciful to your unrighteousnesses, and that your sins and iniquities He will remember no more?' Then let me observe, in conclusion, what just cause you have to celebrate this holy season, not 'with the rioting and drunkenness, not with the chambering and wantonness, not with the strife and envying of those who make provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof,' but with that 'sacred and home-felt delight' which is 'the joy of the Lord.' 'He has put gladness in your heart, more than in the time when the corn and wine and oil of worldly men increase.' There is no joy like the joy of the Spirit, no satisfaction like that wherewith 'a good man is satisfied from himself.' The consciousness of being 'a member of Christ, the child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven,' diffuses through the soul a happiness to which there is none other on earth equal or second. It is 'the peace of God, passing all understanding, keeping the heart and mind through Christ Jesus.' Whoever of you have these spiritual enjoyments, you can understand why your Christian forefathers, who had them before you, should have much observed the birth-day of that Saviour to whom they are all owing;

and can see sufficient cause why you should much observe it yourselves, and commend it to the like observation of your latest posterity. Never ought that day to be forgotten on which 'Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners.' At least, 'let the redeemed of the Lord say so;' you who have tasted the benefits of a Saviour's birth. Only think what you once were, and what, but for His coming into the world, you must for ever have remained, and you can never lack reason or motive for keeping His birthday with warmest gratitude, and striving that it shall be 'had in everlasting remembrance.'

VII.

HIS DIVINE TUITION.

'He wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned.'—Isa. L. part of ver. 4.

THESE words were spoken prophetically by our Redeemer, not in His divine character as 'the fellow,' but in His human character as 'the servant,' of the Lord of hosts. This will be evident to you on considering the words which follow,—'The Lord God hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back. I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting.' The speaker of these words evidently is 'the man of sorrow,' 'the man Christ Jesus,' who for our sakes suffered shame. Hence He is as certainly the speaker in the text. 'He wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned.' At the same time you should clearly understand that 'wakening his ear' meant a totally different thing from 'opening his ear.' 'Opening his ear' meant boring his ear through with an awl, or making him his

servant: whereas 'wakening his ear' meant giving to him understanding and instruction. Considered in His human capacity, 'Jesus increased in wisdom' as well as 'in stature.'

The inspired writers are careful to remind us of our Saviour's real manhood, and how, in that manhood, He by degrees attained 'the measure of the stature of his fulness.' St. Luke says, 'The child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him.' Now that 'waxing strong in spirit,' 'filled with wisdom, by the grace of God upon him,' was the very thing meant in the text. You will be convinced of this by comparing what Christ said before He 'came in the flesh,' with what He said after He was come. What He said before He came was, 'The Lord God hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary: he wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned.' And what He said after He was come, you may see in John, vii. 16. Astonished by His exquisite teaching the Jews had marvelled, saying, 'How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?' Now mark our Lord's explicit declaration of the source of His learning,—'Jesus answered them and said, My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me.' This declaration of His heaven-taught wisdom He put in still plainer words

in John, xii. 49, 'I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment what I should say, and what I should speak. And I know that his commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak.' Words could not be plainer than these as to the source of His wisdom and eloquence; and you observe how exactly they agree with His language in the verse of which the text is part. His eloquence, His power of utterance, He ascribes to His Father in these words, 'The Lord God hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should be able to speak a word in season to him that is weary;' and His wisdom, His secret intelligence, His fund of spiritual perception and knowledge, from which His tongue drew, he equally ascribes to His Father in the text, 'He wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned.'

To these last words I now beg your more particular attention. They describe in a remarkable and lively manner the gentle, gradual, and yet effectual way in which we conceive the Father caught the attention of His 'holy child Jesus,' and 'made him to understand wisdom secretly.' They describe, first, the gentleness of the process, 'He wakeneth mine ear to hear.' It gives us the picture of Almighty God standing at the head of His sleeping Son, and gently soliciting Him from His

slumbers. Such quiet rousing of the attention is the part of a considerate and tender Father. 'When children are to be wakened out of their sleep,' says Mr. Locke, 'be sure to begin with a low call, and so draw them out of it by degrees; and give them none but kind words and usage, until they are come perfectly to themselves and you are sure they are thoroughly awake.' In this fatherly manner God seems to have treated little Samuel of old time, when 'He came, and stood, and called, Samuel! Samuel!' And if He so gently 'wakened the ear' of Samuel, much more that of 'His beloved Son, in whom He was well pleased.'

Secondly, the words of the text describe how gradual was the communication of wisdom from Father to Son,—'He wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear;' *i.e.* He is never weary of instructing me, and yet never overdoes me with too much at a time. He gives me, day by day, some addition to my store, some enlargement of my views and knowledge, so I am able to bear them. With thoughts of Him I lay me down to sleep; and 'when I awake, he is still with me,' presenting truths which I never saw before, and leading me to meditations of ever new interest, profit, and delight.

Yet, gentle and gradual as was the heavenly Father's tuition of His beloved Son, the text clearly conveys to us, in the third place, an impression

how thoroughly it was effectual. If He 'wakened morning by morning,' at last 'he wakened his ear to hear as the learned.' The Father's instructions were not lost upon His Son. 'Not one of his words fell to the ground.' If never was any teacher like the one, so never was any learner like the other. 'He opened his mouth, and drew in his breath: for his delight was in God's commandments.' He inhaled them with eagerness, as the fresh morning breeze of heaven, till, at every step of early life, according to His capacity, He 'was filled with wisdom.' And what His final capacity may have been we have not ourselves capacity to explain. We only know 'the Father gave not the Spirit by measure unto him.' 'It pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell;' 'the fulness of the Godhead bodily.'

In this gentle, gradual, yet effectual way, therefore, was our adorable Redeemer reared into 'a perfect man,' and prepared for the discharge of the high office which He had volunteered to sustain. And, according to our ideas, unspeakably delightful must it have been to 'the Father of heaven' thus to train our Redeemer; and not less delightful to Him to be so trained. Of the nearness of intimacy and dearness of communion between the teacher and the taught, in this instance, we can form but a faint conception: yet one thing is plain throughout all our Saviour's life and actions, that, as 'the man

Christ Jesus,' and sustaining the character of 'a servant,' He never ceased ascribing to His Father the power and glory of whatever wonderful words or works showed forth themselves in Him. His language to Philip, in John, xiv. 10, was His language on all occasions, 'The words that I speak unto you, I speak not of myself; but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works.'

And how the Father spake by Him, and wrought in Him, was, in some manner mysterious to us, through the medium of the Spirit. As a child we have seen 'He grew and waxed strong in the Spirit.' And when, at His baptism, 'the Holy Ghost had descended on him in a bodily shape, like a dove,' we immediately read of His 'returning from Jordan full of the Spirit.' Afterwards, that power of His by which He wrought His miracles, and which in one place He calls 'the finger of God,' He calls in another place 'the Spirit of God.' It is certain, therefore, that when 'the Lord God wakened morning by morning, wakened his ear to hear as the learned,' He did so by means of the Holy Spirit. Our Redeemer, 'in the days of his flesh,' from His cradle to His cross, was entirely under the teaching, guidance, and sanctification of the third Person of the Trinity. And to have this truth clearly made out to our understanding, and firmly established in our minds, is of great practical consequence. Since Christ took our nature upon

Him, and in Him manhood was perfectly taught, guided, and sanctified, from birth to death, by the Father through the Spirit, the way in which we are to be savingly wrought upon becomes manifest, viz. by the same Father through the same Spirit. The work which was perfectly done in our Head, Christ Jesus, must be done, in its degree, in all who are members of His mystical body; and, to confine our attention at present to the work described in the text, if ever we are to understand the things of the Spirit, 'the Lord God must waken morning by morning, must waken our ears to hear as the learned.'

Nothing is more certain than that, if we are to comprehend spiritual subjects, and 'the things which belong to our present and everlasting peace,' we must be graciously visited by our Maker. We must have a spiritual ear given us by Him, and have it continually spoken into us by His loving Spirit, till we are both awakened out of our natural slumber and are gradually taught by Him those things which will 'make us wise unto salvation.' And when we see that even Christ's wisdom came to Him 'from above,' and was instilled into Him by divine suggestion, it cannot surprise us that all the spiritual understanding which any of us shall ever have must come to us from the same source. If ever there was an ear on earth that needed not 'wakening morning by morning, wakening to hear

as the learned,' it was the ear of 'the holy child Jesus.' He was not alienated from God, as we are; He was not by nature born in sin, as we are; nor was His spiritual ear, like ours, 'dull of hearing.' Light, so to speak, were the slumbers of His innocent, though infirm, humanity; whereas we fallen creatures sleep heavily the sleep of death. A whisper, so to speak, woke our Redeemer's vigilant ear; but it is not so with us. We want a call loud as that voice which summoned Lazarus from his grave.

This He knows, who not only uttered that voice over the corpse of his friend, but has made preparation for its repeated utterance over souls which are 'dead in trespasses and sins.' How remarkable His language in John, v. 25! 'Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live.' And once 'alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord,' then their wakened ear is open to divine teaching, and they become susceptible of the gentle, gradual, and effectual instruction of the Holy Spirit. That Saviour, who remembers the value of His Father's teaching to Himself 'in the days of His flesh,' has obtained the blessed promise and unspeakable benefit, that 'all his children shall be taught of the Lord.' Through His merits and mediation, 'the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and

gracious,' is willing to make anew 'the hearing ear' in us fallen sinners, and to 'give His good Spirit to instruct us.' That Spirit is even now on earth. He took the place of the ascended Saviour, and abides with the Church for ever. It is His province and prerogative to 'teach us all things,' and without Him we can learn nothing that will be of saving value. 'The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can He know them, because they are spiritually discerned.' 'But he that is spiritual discerneth all things.' His 'wakened ear hears as the learned;' and the same Spirit which wakened him at first keeps him awake, and 'morning by morning' pours fresh instruction over his mind, and gradually leads him into all essential and saving Christian truth. Nothing can be plainer, both from Scripture declarations and facts, than that this divine 'waking of the ear' makes all the difference between the natural and the spiritual man; and therefore our anxiety ought to be proportionate to have a personal experience of this gracious intervention on our behalf. 'If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his;' and if we have Him, we ought to be aware of the good effects which He has produced upon us.

So, in drawing towards a conclusion, let me lead you individually to reflect, whether you have any reason to think your ear has been wakened.

Has it been 'wakened to hear as the learned?' Are you conscious of any wakening of it to hear with an attention and spiritual intelligence which it had not once? You see the record how Lydia's ear was wakened, or, which means the same thing, how her 'heart was opened' to understand and feel St. Paul's preaching. 'A certain woman,' says St. Luke, 'a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us; whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended to the things that were spoken of Paul.' Has any such change been wrought in you?

Do you remember that you were once 'dull of hearing?' that the Lord might speak to you by the hour through His word, His providence, and His ministers? But, though 'having ears, you heard not, neither did you understand.' You were like a person talked to when you were asleep, and all but totally unconscious what was said, or that anything was said that pertained to you. Do you know that such was the case with you once, but, through grace, is the case with you no longer? Can you sympathise with the blind man's decisive statement, 'One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see?' Whatever else you are uncertain about, are you sure of this, that whereas you were deaf, now you hear? Do you even know where your ear was wakened, and by what means, and through what instrumentality? Or, if you are

not conscious of any sensible wakening at a particular time, are you sure you are awake now? 'The Lord God may have wakened your ear' so early, that you cannot recollect when you had not some spiritual understanding according to your age. This is the case with a few, but with only a few, who, like their Redeemer, from their childhood 'grow and wax strong in the Spirit;' and He 'morning by morning,' as they advance in life, 'wakens their ear to hear as the learned,' giving them 'precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little and there a little,' till, 'by reason of use, they have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.' Some of you may thus be able to say with the thankful Psalmist, 'Thou, O God, hast taught me from my youth up.'

But, whether the fact be so or not, the point of your most anxious inquiry should be, whether you are now intelligent in spiritual things, and able to 'hear them as the learned?' Methinks there must be a consciousness, or at least a suspicion, in the minds of some of you, that you are not. I mean, that you do not comprehend 'the things of the Spirit of God,' but that the Scriptures are to you a sealed book, and you have neither enjoyment nor perception of divine instruction. Do any of you feel a misgiving that such is the case with you? It is a common case, and as sad as it is common.

Spiritual darkness is the rule, spiritual hearing the exception. All are deaf by nature: the few that hear do so by grace. We have only to be let alone, and we 'sleep the sleep of death.' To be roused out of our state of spiritual unconsciousness, we must be 'wakened by the Lord God.' Yet He wakens our spiritual through our natural faculties. We are not stocks and stones, incapable of instruction, persuasion, and impression. We must hear with our outward ears, in order to hear with the ears of our soul; and we must pay attention to things said, that they may sink down into our hearts. If any of you, then, have too sad reason to conclude that the ears of your spirit do not yet 'hear as the learned,' let me entreat you to consider the greatness of your deprivation, the seriousness of your loss, and the fatal result if you should live and die as you are. As you are, you are not like Christ, you are not taught of God, you are not His children. As yet you have no spiritual faculties. You do not understand God. He and you have no sympathy, no intercourse. You are 'without Him in the world.' And if you live and die without Him in this world, you will be without Him for ever. You will be cut off from Him entirely and finally, and so you will be cut off from the only fountain of wisdom and happiness.

What an awful prospect! What a fearful risk! What a reasonable and timely alarm should it

excite in any whose conscience whispers them that their spiritual ear is not yet wakened! How ought they to dread lest it remain asleep for ever! And is there no remedy? Are there no means for wakening the slumbering ear? Thanks be to God, there are means—means which Himself has provided, and which He has engaged to bless. The promise is frank and plain,—'Your heavenly Father will give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him.' That Holy Spirit, as we have shown, is the great agent in imparting spiritual life and perception. You will never 'hear as the learned,' till He 'wakens your ear.' You can hear as the unlearned now. You can comprehend by your natural sense that you do not yet hear by a spiritual sense, and therefore you can understand, by what you know now, that you are to pray for what you do not know now. And spiritual knowledge is not attained, nor to be attained, by your natural sense, however good. It must be attained, if attained at all, by prayer. It must be the gift of God, for Christ's sake, and in answer to prayer. It must be imparted to you by that Holy Spirit for whose teaching you pray. He was the Instructor of the Redeemer 'in the days of his flesh,' and He is willing to become yours, if you will be 'willing and obedient.' 'I will instruct thee,' He says, 'and teach thee the way wherein thou shouldst go: I will guide thee with mine eye.' But 'be ye not like unto the

horse or mule, which have no understanding,' which are refractory or obstinate. If you will be 'led by the Spirit,' prayerful for His guidance, and tractable when guided, that glorious and holy Being will take charge of you, and work His great work in you. And when He works, what shall not be accomplished? 'Who teacheth like him?' 'Is anything too hard for the Lord?' No, nothing; not even your heart. Jehovah, who made you, and gave you your faculties at first, can make you anew, and restore to you those spiritual perceptions and tastes which you lost by our first father's sin and fall. He can give you 'the hearing ear,' and make the dullest among you comprehend the things of the Spirit, and be such apt learners in the school of Christ, as that eventually you shall be 'filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding.' And when we are assured of His ability and readiness to do for any and all of us this great thing, shall we for ever deprive ourselves of it for want of faith and prayer, and humble submission at the throne of grace? Not if we are wise. Happy will those be, who, from what they have heard now, shall henceforth entreat the Lord God that, for Christ's sake, and by His Spirit, He would mercifully 'waken morning by morning, waken their Christian ear to hear as the learned.'

VIII.

HIS GROWTH IN WISDOM.

'And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.'—Luke, ii. 52.

WE are very apt, through the infirmity of our nature, to fall into contrary extremes, forgetful that the opposite of wrong is not always right, nor the opposite of error necessarily truth. Hence, while we shrink from what has been the tendency of modern error in general, viz. to deny or disparage the proper Godhead of our Lord Jesus Christ, we are in some danger of overlooking His proper Manhood.

And yet His Manhood is quite as important to us as His Godhead. In whatever respects He 'left us an example, that we should follow his steps,' He left it to us chiefly as 'the man Christ Jesus.' Imitate Him in the divine parts of His character we cannot, any more than we can perform His supernatural works. But when we behold 'the Word made flesh,' and dwelling among our forefathers 'full of grace and truth,' then we see before us a Being whom we may imitate, and actions that

we can copy. Hence the value to us of every part of our Saviour's human life recorded by an inspired pen.

The text naturally leads us specially to meditate on the example which He has left us as a youth: 'Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.' Plainly He is here set before us in His human, not in His divine character. St. Luke could no more have described Christ as God 'increasing in wisdom,' than he could have described Him as growing 'in stature.' His understanding as God was infinite, and therefore incapable of increase. It is clear the Evangelist speaks of Him in the text as strictly and truly a human youth; the Son of God, indeed, yet also the son of Mary, without the fault and corruption of our nature, but with its real properties and its innocent limitations and infirmities; with powers of body, mind, and spirit substantially like those of any youth; powers not yet fully opened, but opening; and with both an intellectual and moral character not yet matured, but forming, and continually becoming more and more vigorous and amiable, and 'in favour with God and man.' And it is precisely because such was His growing character as a human youth that I have selected it for our present consideration. I wish to set our Redeemer before you all, and especially before you that are young, as the pattern for your imitation.

Consider, then, 1st, His growth 'in wisdom;' and next, His consequent growth 'in favour with God and man.'

Consider, 1st, His growth 'in wisdom.' Wisdom is the power and tact to turn knowledge to the best purpose. Wisdom necessarily presupposes knowledge, but is something far higher and rarer than it. Many young people act unwisely. Their understanding is good, but their judgment is defective. Intellectually they are clever, but practically they are foolish. Either their knowledge is barren of useful results, or it is perverted to mischievous and unworthy ends. Such was not the case with the Lord Jesus in the days of His youth. 'He increased in wisdom;' in continual acquisition, it is true, of fresh stores of knowledge, but also in desire and skill to make use of them in the most judicious and beneficial manner. On what human studies, *i.e.* studies of the literature of this world, our Saviour employed His early days, we are not told; nor was it likely we should be, in the brief narrative of the Evangelist. Enough, however, is said in the sacred volume to convince us He had not been inattentive to the improvement of His mind: for the moment He came forth as a public preacher, His sentiments and language were such as bore the broad impress of cultivation and refinement. 'All bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth;' where 'gracious

words' in the original means choice, elegant, graceful, beautiful words—words, in fact so eloquent, in the highest sense of that expression, as to satisfy all hearers that they came from an accomplished student, whatever difficulty they might have in conceiving where and how He had pursued His studies: 'How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?' They supposed He had never learned, because He had never appeared at any of the famous schools of their country, or sat at the feet of any celebrated Rabbi. But unquestionably He had learned in the privacy and retirement of Nazareth; otherwise why the inspired declaration, that 'he increased in wisdom?' We have seen that we must not resort to the supposition of divine or miraculous increase; and if it was not, as it certainly was not, such increase, then it must have been human and natural increase—increase by God's blessing on the ordinary means of increase, viz. reading, study, prayer, and practice.

To these means, then, there cannot be a doubt our Saviour had resorted, availing Himself, with all industry and zeal, of whatever means of information and improvement His heavenly Father's good providence placed within His reach. But especially He availed Himself of those living fountains of the purest and highest wisdom, the Holy Scriptures. With these, we know assuredly, He had been making Himself familiar from His childhood. At

twelve years old 'his parents found him in the Temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them and asking them questions. And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers.' Here, again, we must not resort to miraculous explanation of His intelligence. He understood as a boy, and answered as a boy, from stores of knowledge and wisdom which He had accumulated by the Divine blessing on His boyish studies. And in proof how He had been growing, not in head-knowledge only, but in practical wisdom, consider His conduct immediately after this extraordinary display of mental superiority. 'He went down with his parents unto Nazareth, and was subject unto them.' Here was the proof of His true wisdom, obedience to His parents.

Mere 'knowledge puffeth up,' makes young people vain, conceited, self-sufficient, and disrespectful to their natural superiors, than whom they flatter themselves they know better, and may therefore venture to slight their counsels and resist their authority. So did not the youthful Saviour. He showed His practical good sense by His cheerful and prompt subjection to His Father's established order of nature, providence, and revelation. Though He evidently knew more, far more than His parents, He honoured them by entire submission to their lawful commands, not only in 'going down with them from Jerusalem to Nazareth,' contrary to His

manifest inclination for the improving opportunities and society of the metropolis, but in afterwards conforming Himself to all their domestic regulations. And this He did from religious principle, because the word of God told Him to do so, to 'honour his father and his mother,' and because He felt it right to do so; because, in a word, He was under the influence of that blessed Spirit, which made Him already esteem it as His meat and drink to fulfil His heavenly Father's pleasure, 'who is not the author of confusion, but of peace.'

When, therefore, He was continually growing in every kind of wisdom, and especially in that highest of all wisdom, loving obedience to the will of His heavenly and earthly parents, can we wonder it is added in the next place, that He increased 'in favour with God and man?' When Joseph and Mary saw His bodily and mental powers daily expanding, and Himself rapidly shooting out of a vigorous childhood and a wise youth into 'a perfect man,' with what admiration must their eyes have naturally followed Him! And when they ever found that there was nothing in His intellectual superiority which in the least degree trenched upon His dutifulness to themselves; when they felt that they were the honoured and happy parents of, not only the ablest, but also the most amiable, and affectionate, and attentive of the sons of men; what emotions of 'sacred and homefelt delight' shall we

not think thrilled through their bosoms! If, in common life, 'a wise son maketh a glad father,' oh how great must have been the gladness of Joseph and Mary! And a youth does not grow in favour with discerning and pious parents (and such were Joseph and Mary) without having those sterling virtues and recommendations which ensure His also growing in favour with mankind in general, who happen to come in contact with him. The good part of mankind, who saw anything of our Saviour in the days of His youth, would esteem and love Him for the same graces which recommended Him to His parents. And the evil part of mankind 'beholding Him would love Him,' so far as was possible to their dispositions. Fallen as men are, and corrupt in general, they are not so fallen and corrupt but that they feel and recognise the attractiveness of a talented and exemplary youth, before he has attained those years, and entered on that ministry, when perhaps he must 'become their enemy because he tells them the truth.'

And such was the case with Jesus at present. On His public testimony against sin it was not yet His province to enter, while He was a youth in His father's house; and not having to lay before His acquaintance 'the offence of the cross,' He had none other. There was absolutely nothing in His private character and proceedings to offend any one: they were unexceptionable: nay more, they

were admirable: they were felt to be so: they were confessed to be so: 'He increased in favour with men' as such, *i.e.* with mankind in general, with every human being who had opportunity to observe His singular piety towards God, His marked dutifulness to His parents, and His astonishing proficiency in 'whatsoever things were lovely and of good report.'

And oh, if through these graces and virtues He so 'increased in favour with man,' with man who is 'evil,' with man who is envious, with man who is malicious, how shall we think He grew in favour with God; with God who is not evil, with God who is not envious, with God who is not malicious! On the contrary, 'the righteous Lord loveth righteousness; his countenance doth always behold the upright.' With what a countenance must He then have beheld His upright Son! While 'He looked down from heaven, and beheld all the children of men,' and saw that 'there was none of them righteous, no, not one; that there was none of them that understood; none that sought after God: but that they were all gone out of the way, altogether become unprofitable; and that there was none that did good, no, not one,' save and except His solitary Son at Nazareth; with what inexpressible complacency and entire delight must His divine eye have rested on that 'holy child' in the midst of a sinful world—on that only green spot in this

'waste, howling wilderness,' on that star of Bethlehem, by contrast so resplendent in the black and dark night! How shall we wonder, that as the infant, the child, the boy, and the youth, Jesus grew continually in stature, in wisdom, in everything wherein He could properly grow, 'till he came unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ,' He should at last have received from God His Father that long-suppressed 'honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory at his baptism, Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased?'

Then, having thus considered our Redeemer's youthful character, let me lay it before all of you, and especially before you that are young, as the pattern for your imitation.

Do not object in the outset that it is a pattern you cannot be expected to copy, because it was set by One who 'was holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners.' You can be expected to copy it, and you are expected to do so. It was set by Himself in His life, and by His Spirit in His word, expressly with a view to your imitation. What He said to His disciples, with reference to one of His imitable actions, is equally applicable to them all, 'I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done.'

To you, then, in the first place, who are yet young, I can give no better or more hopeful advice

than this,—Make it your earnest care, like your blessed Redeemer, to 'increase in wisdom.'

It has pleased God to make us human creatures capable of endless improvement. The growth of our body is but a sort of lesson to the eye of the far more surprising and longer continued growth of the immortal mind and spirit that dwells and swells within its earthly tenement. Nothing is more wonderful than man's capability of intellectual, moral, and spiritual enlargement. Look at the feebleness of a new-born infant, and who, were it not for experience, would believe that, in a few short years, that child should be strong for labour in body and mind, able to fathom the depths of learning and science, to practise the most arduous duties, and to feel the most exalted piety? And yet such is actually the case; the case too occurring, not once or twice, but continually. Continually are young human creatures 'increasing in wisdom,' and pushing towards the heights of mental and moral eminence. And noble and elevated as are the heights attainable, by the Divine blessing, even in this present world, oh, how vastly inferior to those which may be hoped for in the next! 'Now,' said the Apostle, who towered among the mere sons of men in every exalted and exalting acquisition, 'now, I know in part; but then shall I know, even as also I am known.'

Consider, therefore, you that are young, the

hopefulness of your condition, and the cheeriness of your prospects. Be not discouraged at your present state. Remember that 'the Lord of glory,' who now sits on the throne of the universe, was once as young as you are, and partaker of your natural limitations. Even He 'increased' in wisdom, not arriving directly at all knowledge, nor instantly at all virtues. He arrived at them by prayer, by pains, and by degrees. Be you therefore satisfied to arrive at them, at least at some of them, by the same means. You may not, indeed, hope to rival the wisdom of your Redeemer, but you may hope to attain some portion of it. You have the same nature as He had, both of mind and spirit, though you are, what He was not, 'sore let and hindered' by indwelling sin. Yet even 'this fault and corruption of your nature' is by no means a fatal hindrance to your growth in wisdom.

The same Holy Spirit, who perfectly sanctified your youthful Redeemer, and kept Him free from all taint of sin or defect, is able and ready to 'help your infirmities,' enough for all practical and saving purposes. 'To him the Father gave not that Spirit by measure.' He gave it to Him without measure. To you He offers it only by measure, yet in sufficient measure, in answer to prayer. Never forget the important declaration,—'If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy

Spirit to them that ask him.' Ask Him therefore, in Christ's name, with humility, sincerity, and perseverance, and you will not ask in vain. That good Spirit is not unwilling to cherish the youngest, frailest, feeblest child among you that prays. He is Wisdom personified; and speaking in her person He says, 'I love those that love me, and they that seek me early shall find me.'

Having this promise of His 'working in you, both to will and to do, of his good pleasure,' set yourselves heartily to struggle with your natural infirmities and hindrances in the way of acquiring knowledge and goodness, and 'pray always' to be 'taught wisdom secretly.' And use with diligence all the providential means you have for self-improvement. 'Give attendance to reading,' to study, to the cultivation, enlargement, and refinement of your mental powers and spiritual faculties. Be persuaded that wisdom does not come to any one by accident or chance, but by prayer and industry; and whoever employ prayer and industry, to them wisdom never fails to come, sufficient for their need and circumstances. Be superior, then, to the temptations or clamours of the idle, the careless, and the foolish. 'Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good.' Recollect that the youthful Jesus is your proper example, and with Him 'wisdom was the principal thing.' 'There-

fore get wisdom, and with all your getting get understanding.'

And do not mistake mere knowledge for wisdom. Bear awfully and habitually in mind that you may acquire a great deal of knowledge, and be none the better for it, but rather worse, if you do not turn it to useful and pious ends. All knowledge will be vain which does not lead you to holiness, to happiness, and to heaven. Hence, while you eagerly cultivate your intellectual powers, cultivate them ever as handmaids to 'pure and undefiled religion.' That knowledge must be wrong, or at least very defective, which fails of making you live virtuous and godly lives, resembling the life of Jesus Christ. So, if you would 'increase in wisdom,' set about it by growing in humility, purity, tractableness, and order. Lie low in genuine self-abasement at the foot of your Redeemer's cross. There frequently call to mind your many sins, negligences, and ignorances, and let your soul be humbled within you for them. Pray for pardoning mercy and sanctifying grace, through the blood and Spirit of Him who died and lives for you. And, in His name, arise and live a Christian life, after Christ's example, and according to Christ's precepts. Act as He acted, and as He would have you act. Study His character, drink into His spirit, and tread in His steps. In a word, 'put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ,' and so will

you 'increase in wisdom,' in truest practical wisdom, in wisdom for time and wisdom for eternity. And if you shall thus 'increase in wisdom,' there can be no fear but you will increase 'in favour with God and man.' That you will increase in favour with God is certain, and surely that is the chief consideration.

Of how small consequence did it become to our Redeemer that He once increased in favour with men! That favour almost entirely forsook Him as He went on to discharge His duty. Perfectly good and amiable though He was, yet, because He steadfastly set Himself to reprove and amend an evil world by His example and precepts, instead of finding favour He was pursued with hatred, and the popular voice of applause was changed into the infuriate cry, 'Crucify Him! Crucify Him!' In that awful hour when 'no man stood with him,' when even 'all his disciples forsook him and fled,' when He hung alone, a crucified victim for the sin of the world, of what avail or comfort to Him was it that He had formerly been in favour with men? But it was of infinite avail and comfort to Him that He still had favour with God. That favour to Him was 'better than life.' It was the only thing that saved Him from death in the garden and from despair on the cross. His 'visitation preserved his spirit,' till, in its fulness of accomplished suffering and completed redemption, He cried, 'It

is finished; and he bowed his head,' in token of entire satisfaction and dying peace, 'and gave up the ghost.' Then we know that spirit entered into paradise, whence shortly it was 'shown the path of life;' and now, 'in God's presence, he has fulness of joy, and at his right hand he will have pleasures for evermore.'

To increase, then, in favour with God is everything. So let this be your chief care, young people. Walk by faith. Have an eye to God. Live 'as seeing him who is invisible.' Study His word. Make yourselves acquainted with His will. Believe His promises in Christ Jesus. Yield up yourselves to His service. Aim to secure His favour by 'so walking even as Christ walked;' and you will not be disappointed. That favour you will certainly have from Him, and, through Him, from man also, as far as shall be expedient for you. The standing declaration, ordinarily fulfilled, is, that 'godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.' May this 'exceeding great and precious promise' be abundantly fulfilled to you, who, through grace, are going the way to its fulfilment, by treading in your young days in the steps of your Redeemer's youthful life. And oh, if conscience tells others of you, that you are not treading in those steps, that you are not growing in wisdom, nor in favour with God or man, but are idle and

ignorant, careless and sinful, and contented to remain so, God grant that this sermon may be blessed by Him to awaken in you honest shame and compunction, and bring you to true repentance and practical amendment.

In conclusion, let me address a very few words to those of you who are no longer young, but grown up. The example of Christ should not be lost upon you. To you also 'wisdom is the principal thing: therefore get wisdom; and with all your getting get understanding'—understanding to 'know the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent.'

Whatever is your age, whatever your occupation in life, for you the 'one thing needful' is wisdom; which means intelligent, practical religion, sentiments and conduct like those of your Redeemer. Remember, if you would have 'boldness before Him' in the day of judgment, 'as he is, so must you be in this world.' If you do not become like Him in spirit and temper, in principles and habits, now in this present time, you never will be like Him in glory everlasting. Wherefore do you also 'put on the Lord Jesus Christ.' And to this end read the records preserved of Him by His inspired penmen, with habitual prayer for the Spirit of light, and life, and love, to make you comprehend, and feel, and enjoy them. How shall you imitate the example of Christ, and put on His charac-

ter, if you know not clearly what they are? Sit, therefore, at the feet of the Evangelists and the Apostles, and study the portrait of your Redeemer, till you are 'changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.'

IX.

HIS TRANSFIGURATION.

'And it came to pass about an eight days after these sayings, he took Peter, and John, and James, and went up into a mountain to pray. And as he prayed, the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment was white and glistering. And, behold, there talked with him two men, which were Moses and Elias: who appeared in glory, and spake of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem.'—Luke, ix. 28–31.

THESE words describe what is commonly called our Saviour's Transfiguration; which means, His change of bodily appearance. That transfiguration is recorded by the first three evangelists, and by each of them it is put in immediate connexion with words of His to this effect, 'I tell you of a truth, there be some standing here who shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.' By this He seems to have meant, 'There are some standing here who shall have a glimpse of my glory before my coming in the last day. There be some standing here who shall soon see me in such majesty, that they shall have a specimen beforehand of my final majesty, and

easily understand that I am not now what I shall be in my kingdom.'

Such was our Lord's mysterious promise; and 'about an eight days after,' He proceeded to make it good. For then 'he took Peter, and John, and James, and went up with them apart into a high mountain to pray.' And as He prayed, 'he was transfigured before them.' 'The fashion of his countenance was altered, and his face did shine as the sun.' Moreover, 'his raiment became white and glistering,'—glistering 'like snow,' 'white as the light,' 'as no fuller on earth could white them.' 'And Peter and they that were with him,' viz. James and John, 'saw his glory;' saw Him transfigured from 'his form as a servant' into that divine form in which He shall come to judge the quick and the dead at the last day. So that they had ocular demonstration of what was in reserve for their Master, and that He could and would make good those declarations of His about His 'coming in glory, to reward every man according to his works.'

Hence their faith was strengthened, and they were prepared not to be stumbled at their Lord's lowly condition and many sufferings in this world, seeing that, after them all, He would surely 'enter into his glory.' And hence we also should learn not to be discouraged at the low and suffering condition of Christ's mystical body, the Church, here

on earth, knowing that He will one day 'present it to himself a glorious Church,' 'shining forth as the sun in the kingdom of his Father.' When we, therefore, are ready to be 'weary and faint in our minds,' at the prospect or under the pressure of the cross we are called upon to bear here, let us think of the transfiguration; and how 'our light affliction, which is but for a moment, will work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.'

Having taken this general view of the transfiguration, let me direct your attention to the particulars about it which are given in the text, as they will suggest to us some valuable truths and practical reflections. Mark, first, the circumstances under which our Lord's transfiguration took place. 'He went up into a mountain to pray; and as he prayed, the fashion of his countenance was altered.' So, then, He was transfigured in the act of prayer: a fact very much to be observed. It is written of Moses, that when he had gone up to the top of Mount Sinai to hold communion with his Maker, he caught a degree of lustre from the bright Being into whose presence he had obtained admission. Now what is prayer, but communion with God? How suitable, therefore, that, as the Lord Jesus

prayed, 'his face should shine as the sun!' What words can describe the nearness of intercourse between the Son of God and His holy Father on the holy mount! And it was probably during midnight prayer that His transfiguration took place. This is probable from several circumstances. He usually 'worked while it was day,' and retired for devotion at evening. At evening He seems to have gone up into the holy mount, for we find the eyes of His Apostles on the top 'were heavy with sleep;' just as they were at midnight in the garden of Gethsemane. On the top they certainly spent the night; for in the 37th verse of our chapter the Evangelist says it was 'on the next day that they came down from the hill.' It is probable, therefore, that on that high mountain, with body and soul alike raised above the world, amid the stillness of solitude and the seclusion of darkness, as Jesus 'prayed to his Father which was in secret,' His transfiguration took place. 'The night was turned into day.' The mountain-top 'had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine on it; for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb was the light thereof.' 'His face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light;' and the astonished Apostles, waking out of their sleep, 'saw his glory,' and 'were eye-witnesses' of His transfigured majesty.

My brethren, if we ourselves, in our measure,

would be transfigured, we too must go up into the solitary high mountain, and there pray. That is to say, if we would become heavenly-minded, we must ofttimes retire for devotion, get above the world, and 'lift up our heart with our hands unto God in the heavens.' We are naturally 'conformed to this world:' if we would be 'transformed by the renewing of our minds,' we must be much in secret prayer. There is no throwing off our worldliness but by devotion—by intercourse with the world unseen. We shall perish in things lawful, unless we 'watch unto prayer.' Even amid our ordinary occupations, and our permitted and laudable pursuits, we shall become 'earthly and sensual' if we are not spiritualised by communion with God. If the holy Jesus, 'rising up a great while before it was day,' departed into a solitary place, and there prayed, before entering on His ministerial business; and if, when that so spiritual business was over, He yet again sought solitude for prayer, and for conversation with Heaven; how ought we miserable sinners, if 'diligent in business, to be also fervent in spirit!' Our soul by nature 'cleaveth unto the dust,' and is prone to 'mind earthly things.' Never shall we raise it to 'high and heavenly things,' much less sustain our spiritual-mindedness, unless we 'pray always with all prayer and supplication in the spirit, and watch thereunto with all perseverance.' 'Our voice,' therefore, 'should God hear

betimes in the morning,' and 'the lifting up of our hands should be an evening sacrifice.' We should begin and end each day with prayer. We should seek to 'go forth in the strength of the Lord God;' and when we have 'fulfilled our work,' our daily task, we should wash away the daily defilement we contract in our intercourse with the world by nightly application for the cleansing blood of Jesus, and for 'the renewing of the Holy Ghost.' We should 'not give sleep to our eyes, nor slumber to our eyelids,' until we have truly sought to throw off our worldliness, and to attain a spiritual frame of mind by communion with 'the Father of our spirit.'

And, for our encouragement, let us remember He is 'a God who heareth prayer.' While we pray, He can and will 'lift up upon us the light of his countenance,' and make our face to shine with a holy lustre derived from Himself. 'With open face beholding as in a glass his glory, we shall be changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.' It is thus we may, in some degree, be transfigured in the act of prayer, and retain through our worldly avocations a heavenly impression on our countenance and conduct. And when our worldly avocations are all over; when we are retired into the loneliness of a sick chamber, and even of a dying bed; when the shades, not merely of midnight, but of the grave,

surround us; and attendant 'eyes are heavy with sleep;' even then our night may be light about us, and, while we pray, we may see heaven open to receive our prepared spirit.

> 'Prayer is the Christian's vital breath,
> The Christian's native air;
> His watchword at the gates of death—
> He enters heaven with prayer.'

And whom does he see there? He sees 'the spirits of just men made perfect,' who 'appear in glory,' 'talking with Jesus.' We need have no doubt of this, if we consider what the three Apostles saw immediately upon their Master's transfiguration. 'Behold, there talked with him two men, which were Moses and Elias, who appeared in glory.'

There seems to have been a double significancy in the appearance of Moses and Elias with Christ. In the first place, Moses seems to have appeared as the representative of the Law, and Elias, or Elijah, of the Prophets; to show that the departed saints of the Lord, whether under the law or under the prophets, will equally at last 'appear with Christ in glory.'

Moses and Elias are both seen 'talking with him' in holy familiarity, to show that there is no difference in the way of salvation, no partiality in the nearness of intimacy with their Lord, under the law, the prophets, and the gospel. Christ has

been the common Saviour of all faithful people, under whatever dispensation they lived. 'Their times were in His hand' 'in the days of their flesh.' 'They waked in Him, slept in Him, and will appear with Him in glory,' in equal degrees of glory and nearness to Himself, if, according to the talents entrusted to them, they occupied with equal diligence till He called them hence to 'go up higher.' This seems to be the first meaning of the appearance of Moses and Elias with Christ. But secondly, they seem to have appeared with Him as the representatives of the quick and the dead—Moses of the dead, and Elias of the quick or living. Of the saints who shall finally inherit the kingdom of glory, some will pass thither 'through the grave and gate of death;' and some will pass thither without dying, 'mortality' in them 'being swallowed up of life.' So says St. Paul to the Corinthians: 'Behold, I show you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.' So then those, the servants of Christ, who are quick, or living upon this earth when He comes, will not be 'unclothed, but clothed upon:' 'in them death will be swallowed up in victory.'

Now Moses died and was buried, and yet, on the mount, which was the type of heaven, 'he appeared in glory' along with Christ, the representative of all those saints who, concealed in their graves, shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and shall come forth to the resurrection of life. But Elias, or Elijah, did not die, neither was he buried; but 'as he and Elisha still went on and talked, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder, and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.' 'He was translated, that he should not see death;' and he also 'appeared with Christ in glory' on the holy mount, the representative of all those saints who shall 'not sleep, but shall all be changed.' And observe, further, that Elias had no precedence above Moses; they alike appeared with Christ, and at the same time, with equal privilege of approach. Pious Christians, therefore, need not concern themselves whether they shall be alive on this earth when Christ comes, or whether they shall go to sleep in their graves. 'For,' says St. Paul to the Thessalonians, 'this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord, shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we

which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord.' As surely as Moses and Elias were with Him in glory on the holy mount, so surely shall all His saints, whether dead or quick, eventually 'be with him' 'in Mount Sion, the heavenly Jerusalem,' where they shall 'see his face, and his name shall be in their foreheads. And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun: for the Lord God giveth them light, and they shall reign for ever and ever.'

'These sayings are faithful and true: and the Lord God of the holy prophets hath sent to show unto us the things that must shortly be done.'

'Behold, He comes quickly.' 'Wherefore, beloved, seeing we look for such things, let us be diligent that we may be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless.' Let 'our conversation be in heaven,' from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our body of humiliation unto the likeness of his body of glory, according to the mighty working whereby he is able to subdue all things unto himself.'

And if we get thus transfigured, in that last great day of transfiguration, we shall see not Moses only and Elias talking with Jesus, but Abraham also, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the

prophets, and all the apostles, and all 'the general assembly and church of the first-born who are written in heaven;' and we shall exclaim, with more propriety and more joy than Peter of old, 'It is good for us to be here!' Oh, it will be good, indeed! 'that goodly mountain,' where we shall 'see the King in his beauty,' and talk with Him ourselves.

But to return once more to the mount of transfiguration. When 'Moses and Elias appeared in glory, talking with Jesus,' we cannot but wonder, with a holy curiosity, what might be the subject of their conversation. That it was something of exceeding great interest and consequence we may be very sure. If we heard that the Potentates of Europe had come in great state to hold a conference with our Sovereign, we should know they had something of special importance to confer about, or so unusual a meeting would not have taken place. But, behold, on the holy mount the most venerable of lawgivers, and the mightiest of prophets, come from the invisible world, in heavenly splendour, to hold a conference with 'the King of kings, and Lord of lords!' How momentous, therefore, should we justly deem the subject of their conference to have been! About what, then, did they converse with Christ? 'They spoke of his decease, which he should accomplish at Jerusalem.' So the death of the Son of God for the

sins of men was the all-absorbing subject in the mouth of Moses and Elias. This was what the law and the prophets had chiefly talked about before; and here they still talk about it, when they 'appear in glory' in the persons of their representatives.

And truly, brethren, the time will never come when this will not be the leading subject of heavenly conversation, and heavenly song too, to those of our race who shall be 'heirs of salvation.' For ever and ever, out of the abundance of a grateful heart, they will 'speak of Christ's decease which he accomplished at Jerusalem,' and sing, as a still 'new song,' 'Thou art worthy, who wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation, and hast made us unto our God kings and priests.' Let all present, then, consider how often and how much they have spoken of Christ's decease when they have met one another in company. They may judge thereby whether they are in a state of mind to enter with zest into the conversation of heaven. Persons are not changed by death in the spirit of their mind, nor in their prevailing likes and dislikes. If we were all to be transported this moment into the eternal world, we should then have a disposition to talk about what we had a disposition to talk about here. Let us reflect, therefore, what topics we know our heart and

mouth are full of here. If we know that we are disposed to think and speak of almost anything rather than about the death of Christ for our sins, surely 'our heart is not right in the sight of God.' 'Except we be converted,' and have 'the love of Christ shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost given unto us,' we can never 'enter into the kingdom of heaven.' For, if we love not our Redeemer, we should have no pleasure in speaking of His decease for our sins; we should have no enjoyment of the conversation of heaven, and, therefore, God would not put us in the way of having such conversation. But oh, remember, if we had no heart for the conversation of heaven, we should needs fall into the conversation of hell. Let us repent, therefore, if we are conscious in days past of no liking either to think or speak of the crucifixion of our Lord. Was He not crucified for us, to open up a way of escape from everlasting torments? And is that so slight a benefit that it should find no grateful remembrance in our heart, no joyous mention with our lips? Let us be ashamed of being so forgetful and so unthankful towards Him, 'who remembered us in our low estate,' and 'poured out his soul unto death,' to open a way for the salvation of ours. And let us pray for 'a new heart and a new spirit,' and 'a mouth filled with his praise all the day long.' And if any of us have already a liking to 'inquire

and search diligently' into the sufferings of Christ, and the decease He accomplished at Jerusalem; if, with the two disciples going to Emmaus, we enjoy talking together with a pious and trusty friend about all those things which then happened; we have 'a token for good' that we are going to join the company of Moses and Elias, and renew in glory an everlasting, ever-interesting conversation on the self-same subject,

> 'The recollection, like a vein of ore,
> The farther traced enriching us the more.'

Let us thank Him who has given us so right a taste and disposition. If we 'know nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified,' we know enough to fill us with grateful and happy thoughts for ever and ever.

'Our meditation of him may be sweet, we may be glad in the Lord.' And as 'he opens our lips, let our mouth show forth his praise.' 'Let us talk of the God of Jacob, and praise him for ever.' 'All thy works shall praise thee, O Lord; and thy saints shall bless thee. They shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom, and talk of thy power: to make known to the sons of men thy mighty acts, and the glorious majesty of thy kingdom.'

X.

HIS ZEAL TO SUFFER.

'And they were in the way going up to Jerusalem; and Jesus went before them: and they were amazed; and as they followed, they were afraid.'—Mark, x. part of ver. 32.

METHINKS these words are very remarkable, and disclose one of the most affecting incidents in the whole life of our Redeemer. Let me endeavour, first, to open to you the spirit of the text; and secondly, to apply it for our personal improvement.

1st. Let me open to you the spirit of the text. 'They were in the way going up to Jerusalem;' *i.e.* our Lord and His Apostles were. He was making His last journey to the bloody city, well 'knowing the things that should befall him there.' It has often been observed, what a mercy it is we are not able to look into futurity; for the foresight of the many evils and sorrows in reserve for us would keep us in a constant state of agitation and unhappiness. But Christ knew perfectly beforehand all that He had to undergo, and felt all the pangs, not only of present, but also of anticipated, sufferings.

This is certain, because He repeatedly instructed His disciples as to what was coming upon Him. For example, in the text we read, 'They were in the way going up to Jerusalem; and Jesus went before them: and they were amazed; and as they followed, they were afraid. And he took again the twelve, and began to tell them what things should happen unto him, saying, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be delivered unto the chief priests, and unto the scribes; and they shall condemn him to death, and shall deliver him to the Gentiles; and they shall mock him, and shall scourge him, and shall spit upon him, and shall kill him.'

So, then, it was not in happy ignorance of the future that the Lamb of God was walking toward Jerusalem; nor was it with the mere general knowledge of the fact that He should die there. No, we perceive He foresaw every tittle of every indignity and every pain which bitter Jew or scoffing Gentile was about to heap upon Him. What was said of Him in His last hour in the garden was true of Him throughout His life, that 'He knew all things that should come upon him.' Think, then, of our Redeemer—perfect God, and so foretasting the bitterness of every drop in His cup of sorrows; perfect Man also, and endued with the finest feelings and tenderest sensibilities of our human nature: think of this God-man going up toward

the bloody city, and say whether it were not natural to expect He would have gone up towards it with heavy heart and slow, reluctant step?

But did He then so go up? Did His foot shrink back with fear from His approaching struggles? And did His tardy pace betray His inward uneasiness to His light-hearted and more nimble twelve? Quite the contrary. 'They were in the way going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus went before them.' Doubtless His great spirit was full of the glorious errand on which He was going, and His inward zeal quickened His outward movements. There was, all through His life, an amazing resoluteness of determination in our blessed Lord to finish—whatever it cost Him (and oh, who can conceive what it did cost Him?)—to finish the work of our redemption, which His Father had given Him to do. Intending to build a tower of salvation for us perishing sinners, into which we might 'run and be safe,' He did, what He recommends all builders to do, He did 'sit down first and count the cost, whether He should have sufficient to finish it:' and finding He should, at the cost of His own life, He determined with a holy determination to be steadfastly willing. Hear how He speaks of Himself and His purposes in the fiftieth chapter of the prophet Isaiah, six hundred years before He came in the flesh: 'The Lord God hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away

back. I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting. For the Lord God will help me; therefore shall I not be confounded; therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed.'

The vehemence of the language sufficiently shows the vehemence of conflicting nature and resolution in the speaker. And when He had been actually born into our world; when He had endured the pains of infancy, the dangers of childhood, and the toils and sorrows of the riper years of His ministry, and, as St. Luke says, 'The time was come that he should be received up, he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem.' There would have been no need for Him 'steadfastly to set his face,' had not some great conflict, some agony revolting to flesh and blood, been necessary to be gone through. But the Saviour's spirit was as dauntless as it was meek, as firm as it was gentle, as high as it was holy. Nothing and nobody could divert Him for a moment from His settled determination to drink to the very dregs the bitter cup of our redemption. When He first mentioned His approaching death to the twelve, and Simon Peter, with mistaken affection, attempted to turn Him from such thoughts, saying, 'Lord, pity Thyself; this shall not be unto Thee;' mark with what unusual severity the Lamb of God rebuked His too worldly-minded Apostle:

'Get thee behind me, Satan; for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.' You see the Saviour's extreme jealousy of the least tendency to shrink from the work He had undertaken to accomplish. His Father's glory, His own honour, the endless happiness of myriads of redeemed sinners, all, all required of Him to be 'steadfast and immovable.' He was so; yea, He was far more—He was prompt, active, eager to cry, 'It is finished!' He panted for His bloody cross. He said, 'I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!' Hence He longed for its accomplishment. He hastened, He marched, toward the bloody city. His zealous soul gave lightness to His body; and as He and His disciples 'were in the way toward Jerusalem, he went before them.' Probably His countenance, no less than His gait, bore witness to His inward emotion. The disciples saw some very extraordinary symptoms of eagerness in the behaviour of their usually calm and quiet Lord. 'They were amazed,' struck mute and motionless for a moment, while they gazed after Him with admiring wonder; and then 'as they followed, they were afraid'—afraid partly for Him, what this mysterious haste might mean; and partly for themselves, what might be the consequences of steadily following their fearless Master to the dangerous city.

Now, therefore, having in some degree opened

to you the spirit of the text, let me, in the second place, apply it for our personal improvement. We have seen the deportment of the Son of God, our adorable Redeemer. I recommend it for our perpetual recollection under these two points of view; viz. 1st, as the object of our just admiration; and 2ndly, as the pattern for our zealous imitation. Let me recommend the deportment of our Redeemer, 1st, as the object of our just admiration. 'The merciful and gracious Lord hath so done his marvellous works that they ought to be had in remembrance.' And did He ever do a more marvellous work than to hasten on, with such spirit and ardour, to His 'agony and bloody sweat,' to His 'cross and passion?' Was ever anything more astonishing than that He, whose telescopic eye saw in the distance the minutest miseries of Gethsemane and Calvary, should long for those sufferings, at the bare mention of which His Apostles 'were exceeding sorry?'

Oh, who can enough admire the Saviour's zeal for His Father's glory and for our salvation? 1st, for His Father's glory. He felt how He was dishonoured, and His name blasphemed, through our sins; and He was eager to give, on His bloody cross, an awful proof 'to the world, to angels, and to men,' that 'God is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity,' or forgive it without satisfaction; seeing 'it pleased the Lord to bruise' His own

dear Son, 'and put him to grief,' rather than sully His perfect holiness and unspotted justice. Jesus, therefore, was anxious to 'magnify the law and make it honourable,' that God's whole universe might know that 'sin,' which 'is the transgression of that law,' could not be overlooked, nor tolerated with impunity, nor be expiated by a less costly sacrifice than His own blood. Thus, like His prototype Elijah, He was 'very jealous for the Lord God of hosts, because the children of men had forsaken his covenant;' and He hasted to 'pour out his soul unto death,' to wipe away every spot of dishonour cast upon the name and character of His holy Father. We see, then, His zeal for His Father's glory.

Also, who can worthily admire His love to fallen man? God's justice would have been satisfied, and His honour have remained unsullied, by the everlasting destruction of our sinful race, like the race of the fallen angels. But 'Jesus loved us, and gave himself for us, that, through his obedience even unto death,' 'God might be just, and yet the justifier of him that believed in Jesus.' And He gave not Himself by any constraint, save the constraint of holy pity, of Godlike compassion, which could not endure to see us perish everlastingly. Except that constraint of love, there was none laid upon our benevolent Redeemer. When all other hope of our salvation was fled, 'then said he, Lo, I

come to do thy will, O God.' 'Here is my life;' 'no one taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself.' And, 'having put his hand to the plough, he looked not back.' He was all resoluteness and all alacrity to 'finish his work, his strange work, and to bring to pass his act, his strange act,' viz. the death of the Son of God for the redemption of the sons of men. Therefore let us 'love the Lord, because he hath dealt so lovingly with us, and let us praise the name of the Lord most high.' For 'worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.'

But the deportment of our blessed Lord in the text is recommended, not only as the object of our just admiration, but also, 2ndly, as the pattern for our zealous imitation. 'He left us an example that we should follow his steps.' Let us mark, then, His willingness to stoop and to work, and His readiness to suffer and to die, that He might bring glory to His heavenly Father. He says by David, 'For thy sake, O Lord, I have suffered reproach; shame hath covered my face.' He says Himself, 'I seek not my own glory, but his glory that sent me.' And when He had completed this eager march, and felt that Satan's hour of malicious triumph, and His own hour of bitterness and woe, was nigh at hand, we hear Him confessing to His disciples, 'Now is my soul troubled; and what

shall I say? Father, save me from this hour? But for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify thy name.' O holy Jesus, Thy Father's glory was ever uppermost in Thy filial thoughts! Send down Thy Holy Spirit into our hearts, and give us the mind that was in Thee. Teach us also, as 'sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty,' to be ready for any act of pecuniary self-denial, for any expenditure of mental exertion, for any lavishment of personal strength, to 'let our light so shine before men that they may see our good works, and glorify our Father which is in heaven.'

Again, was the Saviour zealous for the salvation of immortal souls? Was He panting to shed His heart's blood, if so be He might rescue them from eternal damnation? And can any of us look upon one another's spiritual interests with cold selfishness, with frozen indifference, and not be ashamed to call ourselves Christians? A Christian is one who 'has the mind of Christ,' and 'if any man have not the spirit of Christ he is none of his.' If, then, 'our Lord and our God' was so anxious and painstaking to save us, we also ought to be anxious and painstaking to be instrumental in saving one another. What can we do so very laborious, what can we undergo so very painful, in furthering the spiritual good of others, but our Redeemer did infinitely more, underwent infinitely worse, to do good to us? Be it that a life so spent in the

zealous 'working out of our salvation,' and in the unwearied endeavour to promote the salvation of our fellow-creatures—be it that such a life must needs be a life of labour and travail, of self-control and self-denial, of resignation of many worldly comforts, and taking up many worldly crosses; of, in fact, perpetual going counter to 'flesh and blood;' should that 'offend us?' Was not the Saviour's life the very same? and we disciples must not think to be above our Master, nor we servants above our Lord. It should be 'enough for disciples if we be as our Master, and for servants if we be as our Lord.' And we must be so. His plain, undisguised declaration is,—'If any man will be my disciple, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.' We shall all soon be in eternity; and what will it profit us then to have enjoyed 'the pleasures of sin for a season,' and to have 'lost our souls, and be castaways?' Whereas, on the other hand, if we 'deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world;' if we 'study to be quiet, and do our own business,' and go on in our 'work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ,' and by this 'patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory, and honour, and immortality;' oh, how sweet will it one day be to rest for ever from our earthly toils, and 'sit down in the kingdom of

God with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and that Saviour at the head of the table,' 'who, for the joy that was set before him,' outwent His disciples, and 'endured the cross, despising the shame, and is now set down at the right hand of the throne of God!'

XI.

HIS CRUCIFIXION.

'There they crucified him.'—Luke, xxiii. part of ver. 33.

IT is very difficult to know in what words to speak of the great event which we commemorate this day, viz. the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus. All language, all thought, fails us, when such an event is under our review. The simplicity of the sacred historians is the only becoming pattern for our imitation. However, remember, brethren, that you are, every one of you, deeply concerned in it. It was, indeed, an event which happened only once, and that more than eighteen hundred years ago; but it was not of passing interest. Its having happened then does not make it a whit less important to us, than if it were happening now before our eyes. It was done once; but its influence is everlasting. We have not done with it. Let us bear in mind that we must hereafter see Him who hung upon the tree for us. He is now in heaven; but 'behold, he cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see him.' And our joyful or mourning sight of Him then may very much depend on the way we look

on Him this morning with the eyes of our soul. So let us look in faith, through the medium of 'the Scripture of truth.' Had we seen Him crucified on Calvary, we might have believed; but He says, 'Blessed are they which have not seen, and yet have believed.' Awake, O our souls; yea do Thou, O Spirit of life, waken them, that this blessing may be ours!

We have a short text, but every word in it full of meaning: 'There they crucified him.' Here are four words presenting four heads, which, however, we will consider in the opposite order from that in which the words stand; viz. the sufferer, the mode of suffering, the executioners, and the place.

We will consider, 1st, the sufferer—'there they crucified him.' Whom? 'Jesus Christ.' And who was He? Aye, who indeed was He? His executioners little knew who He was; 'for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.' Yes, that is who He was, 'the Lord of glory,' come from 'the habitation of his holiness and of his glory' to suffer in the likeness of our sinful flesh, and for our sins, and so to make reconciliation, and re-enter into His glory. We shall never be properly affected by the great event of to-day, unless we have scriptural views of the native Godhead and assumed manhood of Him who suffered. Hear His own language: 'I came forth from the Father, and am come into the

world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father.' 'And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self, with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.' From these His own words we gather the native dignity of Him who suffered in such great humility. We perceive it was a man, and yet not a mere man, that hung upon the cross. 'Truly this man was the Son of God,' 'who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God;' and yet, 'made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, by being made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.' We perceive, then, in the first place, who the sufferer was; He was verily and indeed 'Emmanuel, God with us,' 'God manifest in the flesh.'

Consider, next, the mode of His suffering: 'They crucified him'—a death of consummate shame and pain for the God-man to endure. 'Even the death of the cross,' says the Apostle. For 'the fellow of the Lord of hosts,' to 'take upon him the form of a servant, by being made in the likeness of men,' was an amazing stoop. But His great humility lay in stooping to 'death, even the death of the cross,' the shame of which was so afflicting to His Godhead and its pain to His manhood. How afflicting was its shame, we gather from the

Apostle's setting it forth as the wonder of Christ's endurance, that 'he endured the cross, despising the shame.' And how afflicting to His manhood was its pain, is evident from the epithet for excessive pain which we borrow from the cross, when we call it 'excruciating pain.'

How wonderful, therefore, that He endured the cross, especially when we consider, 3rdly, His executioners. 'They crucified him.' Who? Men—four men; four unfeeling, profane, jeering, Gentile soldiers! They 'crucified the Lord of glory:' they brought Him 'as a lamb to the slaughter;' and yet, 'as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so opened he not his mouth,' or opened it only in the affecting prayer, 'Father, forgive them; they know not what they do!' But it must have been very grievous to Christ to find Himself at the mercy of men who had never been taught to show mercy. How horrible to Him as the Son of man, and much more as the Son of God, that, in His dying moments, He met not with the smallest respect! not with the least sympathy, any more than if He had been 'a beast that perisheth!'—but found Himself stretched out, nailed, helpless, unpitied. Oh, what a thought to Him, that, while all the angels of God worshipped Him, four soldiers of Pilate should thus crucify Him! Well does His Apostle say, 'He was crucified through weakness.'

And where was He crucified? This is the fourth consideration. 'There they crucified him,' on Calvary, 'at a place called Golgotha, or the place of a skull,' 'where were dead men's bones, and all uncleanness.' His was almost the treatment of an ass, 'drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem.' Yes, 'they cast him out of the city,' as they did His first martyr Stephen after Him. They both 'suffered without the gate' of the holy city. 'Their dead bodies lay in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom, and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified.' He was not crucified in Jerusalem, because she was the type of 'the holy city, new Jerusalem,' which is 'pure from the blood of all men.' He was crucified outside Jerusalem; and 'without,' says St. John, 'are dogs, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie.' These characters are 'without the holy city,' and they constitute that great city in which, whether 'spiritually it be called Sodom, or Egypt, or Babylon,' 'in her is found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all that have been slain upon the earth;' 'where also our Lord was crucified' by the dogs and murderers, and idolaters, Pilate's soldiers, 'in the place of a skull,' where probably many a malefactor had suffered before Him, 'whose bones lay scattered about the pit, like as when one breaketh and heweth wood upon the earth,' and where two

more suffered with Him now. 'He was numbered with the transgressors' in the place of His execution, as well as in the position between two thieves in which He died.

We have now, then, shortly considered the four points presented in the text, viz. the sufferer, His kind of death, the executioners, and the place of execution. From each of these some deeply important practical lessons remain to be deduced.

1st, let us call back to mind Who the sufferer was. He was 'the Lord of glory:' and I say His dignity, His deity, is our security. 'God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself.' It was the divinity of our Lord which, joined to His manhood, made Him a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world. 'The Lord, Jehovah, laid on him the iniquity of us all,' and 'his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree.' His manhood could suffer, and did suffer, whatever afflicted manhood seems capable of suffering; and His Godhead gave infinite worth and redeeming merit and efficacy to His sufferings. However much the sons of our race worthily deserved to be punished, in order to vindicate the holiness and justice of God, the punishment of Emmanuel in our stead must have been a sufficient expiation of our offences, and more awfully 'magnified the law and

made it honourable,' than even the everlasting punishment of all us worms of earth could have done. When it was God out of Christ who took vengeance, and God in Christ who suffered vengeance, we are sure from both parties that perfect satisfaction for sin was exacted and was paid. Emmanuel said, 'Lo, I came to do thy will, O God.' He did it: He suffered it: He satisfied it. And now, by the same will of God which doomed us to hell for our unexpiated sins, we have the kingdom of heaven opened to us through the atonement of His dear Son. It is now as much, yea more, the good pleasure of God that we should live through Christ, as that we should have died out of Him. 'He is the propitiation for our sins.' He 'standeth daily' before the eternal throne, appeasing the wrath of God against our sins; and if we flee unto Him with true repentance and faith unfeigned, 'He is of God' daily 'made unto us' 'the Lord our righteousness.' The Father accepts us in His beloved Son, 'in whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of our sins, according to the riches of his grace.' Such is the inestimable benefit we have from the exalted sufferer on whom we are called to meditate this day.

This is the more clear when we reflect, secondly, on the mode of His suffering. 'It is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all

things which are written in the book of the Law to do them.' Each of us comes under the curse, both by nature and practice. For each of us was 'born in sin,' with 'a carnal mind at enmity with God, and not subject to the law of God;' and each of us has more or less lived in sin, 'not continuing in all things written in the book of the law to do them.' Each of us is therefore naturally under the curse of God. But 'Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree.' Now He hung on a tree: 'His own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree.' When He came to the place of a skull, 'there they crucified him;' and that His crucifixion took away the curse of the broken law, and 'obtained eternal redemption for us.' For which of us? For all of us who are willing to avail ourselves of it. Jesus Christ 'gave himself a ransom for all.' 'By the grace of God, he tasted death for every man;' and no one of us need taste death, eternal death, for ourself, unless we wilfully or carelessly neglect to avail ourselves of His redemption. Jesus Christ 'is the author of eternal salvation to all them that obey him.' If, therefore, we be 'willing and obedient;' willing to receive Him as our prophet, priest, and king, and to obey Him in these capacities, we are welcomed, through His cross, to eternal salvation. None of us does God our Saviour shut out,

if we shut not out ourselves by our own wilfulness. His very mode of suffering seems chosen to be an outward and visible sign of the largeness of His redemption. He hung on high, lifted up upon the cross, with outstretched arms; as much as to say, Come unto me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth: my arms are wide enough to embrace you all: you are all welcome to wash in the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness in my pierced side: 'all the day long do I stretch out my hands unto you,' and beseech you by my cross and passion, 'Be ye reconciled to God.'

Brethren, let us not turn away from these inviting arms of redeeming love. Let us not think it 'a small thing' that 'the Son of God loved us, and gave himself for us,' especially when we consider that He did truly give Himself for us. For who were His executioners? Who 'crucified the Lord of glory?' Four Gentiles! As Gentiles they were our representatives from the four quarters of the world; and being but four feeble worms, how should they have crucified 'the mighty God,' 'the Fellow of the Lord of hosts?' 'They could have had no power at all against him, unless it had been given them from above.' They could have pierced no limb of the Son of God, unless He had given Himself to be pierced. But He did give Himself; and the God of justice gave our Gentile representatives power against His dear Son, on account of all

of us, whom the four represented. We were some of the real crucifiers of Jesus. The quaternion of soldiers were powerful by power given to them by our sins. We, therefore, who delivered Him unto them, have the greater sin. 'They knew not what they did' in crucifying Jesus. But did not we know what we did in committing those sins which caused Him to be crucified? To say nothing of our ignorances, to say nothing of our negligences, does our conscience charge us with no presumptuous sins? Have there been no instances in our life in which we sinned wilfully, perversely, and without compunction? I judge no man: judge ye yourselves, brethren: but sure I am, if you know your own selves, you will know it is 'plenteous mercy' in Christ to welcome you to the arms of His redeeming love, after all you have done against Him to alienate His affection from you. 'The love of Christ,' then, ought to constrain us, thus judging, that 'if he died for us all, then were we all dead; and that he died for us all, that we which live should not henceforth live unto ourselves, but unto him that died for us, and rose again.'

And this brings me, lastly, to remind you of the practical lesson that is given us by the place where our Lord was crucified. We showed you it was 'without the gate;' and the Apostle immediately adds, 'Let us go forth, therefore, unto him without

the camp, bearing his reproach.' 'For here have we no continuing city; we must seek the one to come.' And if we would find it, 'we must walk even as Christ walked;' we must 'deny ourselves, and take up our cross daily, and follow him.' But here is 'the offence of the cross.' We naturally love the world, and the things and people of the world; and to come out from among them and be separate, to subject ourselves to the excruciating pain of the world's ridicule and contempt, is what we would fain avoid. But it cannot be avoided, if we would follow Christ fully. 'If any man will be the friend of the world, he is the enemy of God.' Therefore 'love not the world, neither the things that are in the world.' 'Forsake all, and follow Christ; and if the world hate you, marvel not at this: you know it hated Him before it hated us.' And if it hates us, God will love us. 'Come out,' He says, 'and I will receive you, and will be a Father to you; and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.' And the favour of the Lord Almighty has been thought by many an abundant compensation for the world's frown. It was so thought by Moses, 'who esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward.' It was thought so by St. Paul, who 'counted all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord; for

whom he suffered the loss of all things, and did count them but dung, that he might win Christ, and be found in him.' So, if we have in us the spirit of Moses and of Paul, and of many another saint of the Lord that might be mentioned, we shall neither be ashamed nor afraid to go forth to our Redeemer without the world, 'bearing his reproach.' We shall gratefully remember that He was not ashamed nor afraid to go forth for our sake from Jerusalem, and be crucified in 'the place of a skull;' and we shall not love that world which hated Him; nor regret that cross which He chose: but, forasmuch as Christ also suffered for us in the flesh, we shall arm ourselves likewise with the same mind. 'They that are Christ's must crucify the flesh, with its affections and lusts;' and the contemplations of this day are designed to inspire us with motives and with strength to do so. May they be sufficient for this end, by being to us the channels of spiritual influence! If not your minister merely, but the Holy Ghost, 'take of the things of Jesus, and show them unto you,' then, and then only, will they have an irresistible attraction, and affect you in a suitable and lasting manner. Jesus Christ cannot before your eyes be 'evidently set forth crucified among you,' unless 'the eyes of your understanding be enlightened,' to 'see him who is invisible.'

May the Spirit of God give you that precious

'faith which is the evidence of things not seen!' and may the cross of Christ fill you with such affections, and constrain you to such deportment here, that when, by 'looking unto Jesus,' you have 'endured your cross, despising its shame,' you may hereafter, with Him, 'for ever sit down at the right hand of the throne of God!'

XII.

HIS RESURRECTION.

'And when he had so said, he showed unto them his hands and his side. Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord.'—John, xx. 20.

CONSIDERING the immense importance of our Lord's resurrection, and of the truths and consequences connected with it, we are not surprised that the evidence given of its reality and certainty was the strongest possible. Our risen Lord intended it to be so, and His Apostles and first disciples felt it to be so. Accordingly, St. Luke observes, 'He showed himself alive to them after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days.' 'When he had risen early the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene.' The moment He addressed her in His wonted manner she knew His voice, and immediately threw herself before Him in a transport of wondering joy. However, He bade her not detain Him then, as time was precious, but go and tell His brethren of His resurrection. Accordingly she and the other women 'ran to bring his disciples word. And as

they went, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail! And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him.' Then He appeared to Simon Peter alone; and, no doubt, had an affecting interview with him, though the particulars of it have not been recorded. After that He appeared to Cleophas and his companion on their way to Emmaus, and 'was known of them in breaking of bread.' They, though 'it was toward evening,' instantly returned to Jerusalem, to communicate the comforting fact of their Lord's resurrection. But they soon discovered they were not the only persons arrived at a conviction of the joyful truth; for 'they found the eleven gathered together, and those that were with them, saying, The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared unto Simon!' 'And as they thus spake, Jesus himself stood in the midst of them, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you! But they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit.'

This is the interview between Christ and His disciples recorded by St. John in the text, and He gives us a natural and sufficient explanation of the surprise, and even terror, with which the Apostles at first beheld their Lord among them. For not only was His appearance plain and sudden, at a moment when they were deeply agitated by contending hopes and fears concerning Him; but also

He 'stood in the midst of them,' when they had conceived themselves secured against the entrance of any one into their place of meeting. St. John tells us 'the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled.' They 'were shut for fear of the Jews,' and the original implies, they were barred as well as shut. When, therefore, under these circumstances, Christ had with all power and quietness opened the doors, and presented Himself with perfect plainness in the very midst of them, we can easily understand how at first they should have been 'terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they saw a spirit.' 'But he said unto them, Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts (*i. e.* doubts) arise in your hearts? Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see me have. And when he had thus spoken, he showed them his hands and his side;' *i. e.* He made them examine the marks left on His hands by the nails which had pierced them at His crucifixion, and the scar left on His side by the soldier's spear, till they were quite satisfied that it was indeed the very Lord Jesus who had suffered on Calvary, and been buried in the garden, and was now alive again. And their satisfaction was at last complete. 'Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord.'

I might point out to you the further satisfaction He soon afterwards gave them, to Thomas, and to

the whole body of the five hundred brethren assembled in Galilee, by letting them see Him, hear Him, feel Him; by eating and drinking with them; and in various ways, through the long period of forty days, making themselves sure that He was their Lord and Master risen from the dead in His own human body, and none other. But there is no need for me to enlarge further on the evidence of His resurrection. Let me rather call your attention to some weighty truths and consequences connected with it.

It appears, in the first place, that, when He rose from the grave, and took again His body, it was indeed substantially the same body in which He had before lived and died. It was a 'body with flesh and bones, and all things pertaining to the perfection of man's nature.' And with this body He ascended into heaven; in this body glorified, He now sits at the right hand of God, 'angels, and authorities, and powers, being made subject unto Him;' and in the same body He will be revealed from heaven, and return to judge all men in the last day. These truths with regard to our Lord Jesus Christ are inseparably connected with His resurrection.

Then, secondly, there are other truths, with regard to ourselves, similarly connected with His resurrection in the way of consequences. His resurrection is always set forth in the New Testament as both

the pledge and the sample of our own. 1st. It is the pledge of our own. 'Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that sleep. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.' 'All that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth.' And in the second place, it is the sample of our own. We have seen that Christ rose again with a real body, a body of flesh and bones. We, therefore, shall rise again with a body of the like kind. Hence, when St. Paul says that 'flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God,' we must limit and expound his meaning by the words which follow, 'Neither doth corruption inherit incorruption.'

It appears that by 'flesh and blood' he meant our present flesh and blood, in its corrupt and corruptible state. And most true it is that our body, in its present natural, fallen, sinful, and perishable condition, 'cannot inherit the kingdom of God,' because 'there is no death there.' But by denying that 'flesh and blood' can inherit the kingdom of God, the Apostle did not mean to deny that 'flesh and bones' can inherit it; because they do inherit it now, in the person of Christ. And in order for them to inherit it, a mighty and mysterious change took place in the substance of our Lord's body. I say mysterious, because we but very imperfectly comprehend the nature of that change.

Yet it was a change from what the Scripture calls 'a natural body' into what it calls 'a spiritual body.'

To us, at present, the expression 'spiritual body' seems a contradiction, we being, as yet, accustomed to regard body and spirit as opposites. But we suppose that, by 'a spiritual body,' may be meant 'a body of flesh and bones, and all things pertaining to the perfection of man's nature,' only refined, spiritualised, made free from the principle of corruption, and rendered a worthy habitation for the perfected human spirit to dwell in with advantage and delight for evermore. We are certain that Christ has taken a body of flesh and bones with Him into heaven, because His risen body was handled by His disciples. And His risen body was His spiritual body, His body that should no more return to corruption. And the body with which He rose was the same in which He showed Himself to His disciples during forty days, and with which they saw Him ascend, and angels testified that with it He was gone into heaven. Indeed, Stephen afterwards 'saw heaven opened,' and Jesus standing in that body at the right hand of God: and in that same body He was still later seen of Paul, 'as of one born out of due time;' for Ananias said to him, 'The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know his will, and see that Just One, and hear the voice of his mouth.' Also

St. John in Patmos saw Him, 'as a lamb that had been slain.' The Scripture, therefore, does not suffer us to doubt that Christ our Lord has with Him in heaven a true human body of flesh and bones, and the same body in which He rose from the dead. During His forty days' sojourn with His disciples in that body, He did not indeed clothe it with its proper lustre and full majesty, because, had He done so, its brightness would have been insufferable to their natural powers, and have prevented their enjoying with Him that quiet and satisfying intercourse which was necessary for their establishment in the faith, and for their being accomplished witnesses of His resurrection. Therefore, though after His resurrection He had His spiritual body, He veiled the glories of it during His remaining span on earth, in condescension to the infirmities of His followers. But when He had ascended into heaven, we conceive He then put on the splendour in which His Apostles had a glimpse of Him on the mount of transfiguration, and in which St. John saw Him in Patmos, with 'a countenance which was as the sun shineth in his strength.' His Father and the holy angels could bear those splendours, though His Apostles could not; yea, those splendours were perfectly appropriate to His uplifting redeemed manhood to glory, and, in it, taking His seat at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens. But now, if that body, in

which our Lord rose and ascended, and is glorified for ever, is a body of flesh and bones, such will be our body when we rise again, at least such will be the body of every risen believer and heir of salvation.

Very little is said in Scripture as to the bodies of the wicked and the lost. Thus far we are certain, that 'there will be a resurrection both of the just and of the unjust.' Christ's words on this point are plain and decisive: 'All that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation.' But what sort of a body the risen lost will have is a fearful secret. Clouds and darkness rest upon it, hiding all about it from our knowledge, except that it will be a body capable of undergoing unconsumed, everlasting torment, 'the worm that never dies, and the fire that never shall be quenched.' But though there is this dread reserve as to the bodies of the risen lost, there is no reserve as to those of the risen saved. For their comfort the declaration is express, that Christ 'shall change their body of humiliation into the likeness of his body of glory.' We conclude, therefore, that all the heirs of salvation will, at their resurrection, have a body of which Christ's body at His resurrection was a sample. They will have 'a real body of flesh and bones, and all things appertaining to the

perfection of man's nature.' Yet it will also be, in some sense, as the Lord's is, 'a spiritual body,' incorruptible, glorious, powerful, to be the helper, not the hinderer, of their perfect and happy spirit for evermore. Such, however, have all Christ's saints in reserve for them at His second coming.

But now there is one more truth regarding ourselves, and inseparably connected with our Lord's resurrection, which we ought to notice; and it is this: that whatever change may have taken place in our bodies when we rise from our graves, it will not be such as at all to interfere with our identity: I mean, though the change in us may be, and will be, great in some respects, it will not prevent our being, essentially and substantially, the same persons that we were when we went to our graves. Hence, we shall immediately recognise ourselves as such, and be mutually recognised by one another. Our Lord, after His resurrection, 'beheld his own hands, and his own feet,' that it was He Himself; and He claimed and received the recognition of His disciples on the same ground. Though He was no longer 'compassed with infirmity,' nor 'His visage marred more than any man's, and his form more than the sons of men,' yet He and His Apostles were equally and perfectly aware that He was the same Jesus who had suffered under Pontius Pilate, been crucified, dead, and buried; and that, prior to those events, they

had had such and such communications together. 'These are the words which I spake unto you while I was yet with you.' In short, Christ, after His resurrection, was consciously and manifestly the continuation, under new circumstances, of the Christ who had gone to His grave.

Then we must needs look forward to the same experience with regard to ourselves. When we shall have risen from our graves at the general resurrection in the last day, however we may be altered in some respects, we shall not be so altered but that we shall perfectly know ourselves, and know one another, and remember our lifetime on earth, what we said and what we did, and everything that passed between our Lord and ourself, and between our neighbour and ourself. And I need hardly say how serious and weighty an influence over us this very consideration ought to have. Such as we live and die now in this present life, such shall we substantially be on the morning of the resurrection. When we come out of our tombs, waked by the voice of the archangel and by the trump of God, and find ourselves in our new bodies, 'changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye,' we shall still be thoroughly conscious who we are, and what have been our past feelings and life towards God and towards men. Thus we shall be fully cognisant of ourselves. And we, who were connected on earth,

shall as surely recognise one another. If each will be sure enough of himself to say, 'It is I,' each will also be sure enough of his neighbour to say, 'It is he.' Plainly the disciples knew Christ after His resurrection, and plainly St. Paul calculated on knowing his Thessalonian converts, when he said to them, 'What is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye, in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?' Recognition, then, is certainly to take place in the cases of some that were connected here on earth; and there seems no room to doubt it will take place in the cases of all.

And deeply should the thought of it weigh with us 'herein to exercise ourselves, to have always a conscience void of offence towards God and towards men,' that, in the last great day of judgment, we may be found both of Him and of one another, 'in peace, without spot, and blameless.' Oh, how miserable, on the one hand, will be the feelings of those, who 'shall awake from the dust of the earth' to the consciousness that they 'neither feared God nor regarded man?' How will they dread the eye of that Lord whom they slighted, and that crowd of human neighbours whom they variously wronged! and being tried, cast, and condemned, how will they slink 'to shame and everlasting contempt!' But, on the other hand, think of the joy with which true Christians will wake from their sleep in Jesus,

and see Him whom their souls loved! And think, too, of the comfort with which those will meet and recognise each other, who here 'strengthened one another's hands in God,' who here 'bore one another's burdens,' and helped one another forward in the way to heaven! And may these solemn contrasted considerations, through grace, 'sink down into our hearts,' and make us more carefully prepare to meet our God, and also to meet our neighbour!

XIII.

THE FIRST-FRUITS OF THEM THAT SLEEP.

'Behold, I show you a mystery: we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.'—1 Cor. xv. 51, 52.

WE celebrated on Good Friday the death, for our sins, of 'the man Christ Jesus.' To-day we celebrate His being 'declared to be the Son of God with power by His resurrection from the dead.' And since the God-man Christ Jesus was the head of the Church, which is His body, what the head underwent all the members virtually underwent also, or will undergo. Hence, St. Paul speaks of the whole Christian body as 'crucified with Christ,' 'dead with him,' 'buried with him,' and 'risen with him.' Their oneness of experience with Him in this last particular is as certain as in the other three particulars. His own most distinct and gracious promise before He left them was, 'Because I live, ye shall live also.' This promise, made to us in its fulness of course only on the supposition of our being, as those were to

whom it was first made, sincere Christian believers, pertains as much to the everlasting life of our bodies as to the everlasting life of our souls. The everlasting life of Christ in body and soul lies at the foundation, and as the foundation, of our everlasting life in both respects.

In both respects, *i.e.* in respect of our body, equally as in respect of our soul, 'our life is hid with Christ in God; and when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall we also appear with him in glory.' Our great and blessed hopes as Christians, both for body and soul, are all bound up with the experience and promises of our Redeemer. And nowhere is this truth so fully brought before us, and opened to us, as in the chapter from which the text is taken, the fifteenth chapter of St. Paul's first Epistle to the Corinthians.

With the words of the chapter our ears are familiar, from our frequent hearing of them in the solemn Burial Service, which most of us in turn have occasion often to attend. But oh, let not our familiarity with the sound of the chapter make us thoughtless and careless of its sense: for indeed it is a wonderful and invaluable chapter, and treats with incomparable plainness and force on matters in which we all are inexpressibly concerned. 'It is appointed unto men once to die.' We see continually that our nearest friends and neighbours do die. Whether they be high or low, rich or poor,

infants of days or old men that stoop for age, we see them carried to the grave, and we expect to be carried thither ourselves. And as the doors of the tomb close over the dead, we think within ourselves, as Job did, 'If a man die, shall he live again?'

It is a solemn question; it is a weighty question; and, moreover, it is a question which the mere light of nature, the alone force of reason, could not answer. When Athenian philosophers, some of the acutest and best informed of natural men that ever lived, 'heard' from St. Paul 'of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked,' as deeming the very mention of such a thing an insult to their understandings; 'and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter,' as a matter too strange and astonishing to be taken in by anybody at once. And when this same Paul preached this same doctrine before Festus the Roman governor, a man intelligent enough on other and all ordinary subjects; and when in proof of it the Apostle averred that Christ had actually suffered, and been the first to rise from the dead, and thereby show light to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles in general; 'as he thus spake, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself, much learning doth make thee mad.' So incredible a thing did it appear to natural men, even of the most cultivated minds, 'that God should raise the dead,'

you perceive the straightforward preacher of this truth was vehemently accused of insanity. But he quietly and courteously answered, 'I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak forth the words of truth and soberness.'

The fact was, Paul knew what the philosophers of Athens and the governors of Rome did not know. Paul knew the Lord Jesus, the Son of man and the Son of God; knew that He had come down from heaven, taken our human nature into union with His divine nature, and become 'God manifest in the flesh.' Paul knew that Christ, for more than thirty years, had walked and laboured in the holy land, and still taught the great multitude around Him incomparable wisdom; and then, without sin of His own, had 'died for our sins,' the sins of us men, and 'risen again for our justification;' and had resumed his body of flesh and bones, and all things pertaining to the perfection of man's nature, and therewith had ascended into heaven, to sit there at the right hand of God, till He return to judge all men at the last day, and raise them from their graves first, in order that He may judge them. Paul knew all this with the full assurance of understanding; and by divine permission and suggestion the Apostle disclosed all these things, and more, to his converts in Corinth, who had been somewhat 'shaken in their minds' about the certainty and nature of the resurrection. Evidently

some in Corinth, like some in Ephesus, 'had erred from the truth, saying, that the resurrection was past already, and were overthrowing the faith of some.' St. Paul, therefore, under immediate and special inspiration, restated to his beloved Corinthian brethren in this fifteenth chapter all the fundamentals of the Gospel, and particularly the full and exact truth of the resurrection—the resurrection of Christ first, and the resurrection of all His believing followers, as inseparably bound up in that of their Lord and Head.

To prove the reality of our Lord's resurrection, the Apostle brings the accumulated testimony of eye-witnesses, who were familiar with His person before He died, saw Him dead, saw Him buried, and saw Him alive again after His passion, and so had every satisfaction their senses could give them of the certainty of His being risen in the same body in which He had been crucified—substantially the same body, whatever it might have undergone of spiritualisation and change and improvement. Yea, St. Paul brings forward himself, as having had unmistakable evidence of his Lord's resurrection, for that he had seen Him and conversed with Him on his way to Damascus. And then, having established the certainty that Christ was risen, the Apostle proceeds to establish and declare the equal certainty that all Christians will rise too. 'Now,' he says, 'is Christ risen from

the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that slept;' *i.e.* are laid to sleep. 'For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.'

Then the Apostle proceeds to meet the question which he foresaw would be put, 'How are the dead raised up, and with what body do they come?' And he answers, that, from the analogies of nature occurring before our eyes, taken in connexion with the words of Scripture, we may well expect that our bodies, on springing up again from the dust of the earth, will be found to have undergone great alteration and improvement, though not such as to interfere with the certainty of their being our own bodies, the bodies in which we respectively lived and died, when we inhabited this earth. Each of us on rising, and coming forth from our graves to meet former friends come forth from theirs, will be able to say, as our risen Lord said, 'Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself.' There can be no doubt then 'we shall know even as also we are known.' At the same time we may well believe that we shall be filled with surprise and admiration at the amazing change for the better which we shall see has passed on others, and which we shall be conscious has passed on ourselves.

How largely for the better this change will be St. Paul gives us a lively idea, both from the

occurrences in nature around us, and from positive statements. We commit, for example, a grain of wheat to the ground, and it goes to decay, and lives for a long time hid from our sight; and, but for experience to the contrary, we should think we had lost it for ever. But by experience we have learnt to know that we have by no means lost it. We have acquired a happy confidence that, in process of time, we shall receive it back again with increase. If we receive not the identical grain of wheat that we sowed, we receive wheat like what we sowed, and in such quantities as will make it a great improvement on what we sowed. Prior to experience, who would have expected so great an advantage to arise from death? And yet from death it does arise, and no other way. 'Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.' In like manner a corn of barley falls into the ground, and dies; and it also reappears, very much advantaged. And say, once more, a corn of oats falls into the ground, and dies; and it too comes back to us, amplified into much fruit. Moreover, you should observe, that though the amplification is real, and great, and gratifying in each case, it is different, widely different, in the three cases. A grain is sown in each case; but the produce in the first ear is an ear of wheat, in the second an ear of barley, and in

the third an ear of oats; all the ears valuable and pleasing, all of them great improvements on the corn sown, but wonderfully different improvements. And so in all cases of the strangely varied seeds that are sown, all are reproduced with still more strange amplifications, each according to the good pleasure of Him who alike gives the seed and its increase. 'God giveth it a body, as it hath pleased him, and to every seed its own body.'

From these occurrences, then, in nature before our eyes, we may well anticipate those improvements, endlessly varied improvements, in Christian bodies which St. Paul in positive statements declares shall take place in Christ's servants, 'at the resurrection of the just.' He says, which is true, that our present body, the body of the most Christian person among us, 'is sown in corruption,' but he adds, 'It will be raised in incorruption; it is sown in dishonour; but it will be raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; but it will be raised in power.' And then he introduces to our faith a new wonder of improvement expressed in new language, which at present we cannot understand, and which we never shall understand till we come to understand it by blessed experience. He says our present body will 'be sown a natural body; but it will be raised a spiritual body.' Now what 'a spiritual body' may be, we cannot tell, we cannot even imagine. But the inspired Apostle vehe-

mently declares there is such a thing. He says distinctly, 'There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.' And he adds that the difference between the two is no less than the difference between Adam's earthly body and Christ's heavenly body, that glorious body which Christ wore on the Mount of Transfiguration, when 'his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light,' and in which glorious body He will appear, when He comes as the second man, 'the Lord from heaven.'

Judging, therefore, from the but little which Scripture tells us of Christ's present glorious body, we suppose that that is what is meant by 'a spiritual body,' a body free from all taint of corruption, and all liability to it—free from all defects, all infirmities, all hindrances, all grossness—a body refined as nearly as may be to spirit, and fitted for the most active services, liveliest sensations, and purest delights of the celestial state. How Christ will refine our present flesh into 'spiritual flesh' we know not: but He has said that He will, and that should suffice us. 'Is anything too hard for the Lord?' 'All flesh is not the same flesh,' as we know by the different sorts of flesh in this present creation; nor are all bodies of our present acquaintance equally glorious bodies. We must believe the Lord, and that He will and can change this flesh of ours into spiritual flesh, and transfigure our

present body of humiliation into the likeness of His body of glory, 'according to the mighty working whereby he is able to subdue all things unto himself.'

In conclusion, there is one point more respecting the resurrection, which, in the text, the Apostle lets us into as a secret. He says, 'Behold, I show you a mystery,' a doctrine hitherto unknown, a truth up to this time kept secret, but which now I tell you. 'We Christians shall not all sleep;' *i.e.* we shall not all die, so as to have all our bodies mouldering in the grave, though that is the general doom: 'but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall,' immediately at its summons, 'be raised incorruptible, and we,' whoever of us in the Christian body may then be living on earth, 'we shall be changed,' just as Enoch and Elijah were changed instantaneously, at the moment of their being carried up into heaven.

So, then, if we be Christ's sincere disciples, loving and serving Him while we have time and opportunity, it will practically make no difference to us, whether we are living on this earth or resting in our graves when He comes to judgment. On either supposition 'this corruptible will put on incorruption, and this mortal will put on immortality.' 'The Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the arch-

angel, and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ will rise first.' 'Then we,' whosesoever lot it may then be to 'be alive and remain' on this earth, 'we shall be caught up together with them,' *i.e.* together with the raised dead, 'to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord.' 'Wherefore comfort one another,' adds the Apostle, 'with these words,' whoever of you are conscious of being, through grace, devout and upright Christians yourselves, and have the prospect of meeting in glory your devout and upright brethren and sisters in the Lord.

But oh, if your heart misgives any of you, that you are living in sin, and like to die in it if you continue as you are, 'repent, and be converted,' 'that your iniquities may be forgiven, and your sins covered,' and your souls renewed, before it be too late: for most assuredly, 'the resurrection in the last day' can be a blessing only to those who have first been raised from their natural death in sin to a 'life of righteousness.'

XIV.

HIS ASCENSION.

'Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels, and authorities, and powers, being made subject unto him.'—1 Pet. iii. 22.

THESE words are spoken of the Lord Jesus Christ, of His ascension into heaven, and of the place of dignity and might which He there holds. These subjects are specially set before us by our Church at the present season: let me, therefore, draw to them your earnest heed. They are infinitely worthy of it, and I trust that, with the Divine blessing, they will reward it well. We will take the Apostle's language as it lies before us in the text, and endeavour to draw from it some of that instruction which it was written to convey. He had just been speaking of the resurrection of our Lord and Master; and then he proceeds to trace Him from earth to heaven; from the depth of humiliation in this lower world to the summit of glory and honour in the bright world which is above. On our Lord's resurrection we dwelt at Easter. We saw that, on that day, He rose from

the dead, with His own body in which He had been crucified and buried—a true human body of flesh and bones, and all things pertaining to the perfection of man's nature. In that body He repeatedly showed Himself alive to His disciples, and gave them every satisfaction that it was not a spirit, but that it was He Himself; for that a spirit had not flesh and bones as they saw Him have. In the body, then, He conversed with them at intervals during forty days, 'speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.' And when those forty days were expired, 'he led them out of Jerusalem as far as to Bethany,' which was on the Mount of Olives, about a mile from the city. There He gave them His last charge, and then 'lifted up his hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, that he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven.' 'While they beheld, he was taken up, and a cloud received him out of their sight.' 'And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven, as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.'

From this declaration, then, of the angels, taken in connexion with St. Peter's declaration in the

text, we gather all the points relating to our Lord's ascension into heaven, and His position and purpose there, which are most important for us to know distinctly. So let us consider them in turn, and may His Spirit make them good to the use of edifying.

It is certain, in the first place, that our Redeemer 'is gone into heaven,' having carried with Him thither our nature; a true and real human body of flesh and bones, refined, spiritualised, and glorified, yet substantially the same as that in which He lived on earth for three-and-thirty years, in which He was crucified and buried, and with which He rose again from the dead.

And it is equally certain, in the second place, that, when He went bodily into heaven, He went to the highest possible place of glory in it. St. Peter says in the text, 'He went to the right hand of God,' which is the usual Scripture expression for the topmost dignity and honour. The sacred writers evidently labour for language to convey to us some just notion of the incomparable elevation to which the God-man Christ is raised. In his Epistle to the Ephesians, St. Paul calls our attention to 'the working of God's mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and

power, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come; and hath put all things under his feet, and given him to be head over all things to the Church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.' Language can go no further in describing the dignity to which Christ is raised. At the same time we should clearly understand, that when He is spoken of as raised to this surpassing honour and glory, it is meant that He is so raised only with regard to His human nature. The blessed Son of God, in His Divine nature, was not capable of being raised any higher than His natural and original elevation as God. 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God.' Speaking, therefore, of Christ in His divine nature, He was from everlasting in a state of majesty and happiness which admitted of no increase. His dignity as God was exactly the same when He came into our world as when He left it and went back to His Father. Hence, still speaking of Himself in His highest, His Divine capacity, He could desire no more than He did desire, when He said, with reference to His approaching ascension, 'And now, O Father, glorify thou me with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.'

So, then, the Divine nature of our Lord was

familiar with the heights of glory 'before our world was.' 'The right hand of God' was His accustomed seat from all eternity; and when He ascended into heaven from Mount Olivet He only returned, as far as His Divine nature was concerned, to His wonted position as 'over all, God blessed for ever.' It was no new thing to Him as God to see angels, and authorities, and powers subject unto Him. They had been so subject unto Him from the time He made them, and, as their Creator, first gave them their being. The new thing was for manhood, in His person, to enter heaven of right; to open the everlasting doors of the palace of the great King, and walk up to His immediate presence and embrace; to sit down at His right hand, and there receive the homage of 'thrones, and dominions, and principalities, and powers, and every name that is named.' This was a new thing, that Christ in our nature, in a glorified human body of flesh and bones, should sit as God in the supreme temple of God, 'showing himself that he was God.' This was His special reward as 'the man whom the King of kings delighted to honour.' This was the peculiar and signal recompense which His holy Father gave Him for all His unspeakable condescension and self-denial, in 'humbling himself to lay aside the form of God, and take upon him the form of a servant, and be made in the likeness of men, and suffer for our sakes, and for our

salvation, unspeakable degradation and misery, even unto the death of the cross.' Therefore it was, says the Apostle, that God also 'highly exalted him,' and willingly accorded Him the distinguished honour and joy of raising that human nature, which He had so graciously assumed, into union with the Deity, and receiving in His capacity of man, as well as in His capacity of God, the utmost admiring adoration that can be paid to Him 'by those in heaven, and those on earth, and those under the earth.'

And now, from this surpassing honour put by the Supreme Being upon the man Christ Jesus, expressly under the character of our Redeemer, and in consequence of His being so, we gather, with great certainty, two or three momentous conclusions.

1st. Since Jesus Christ 'is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God,' we have, in that fact, a complete proof of His having thoroughly effected our redemption. He saw us fallen and lost, and ready to perish under the crushing burden of our sins; and when He had died for our sins He rose again on the third day, and showed Himself openly, unarrested and unchallenged. Therefore He must have paid all that was due from us to Divine Justice. And when He not only walked at liberty on earth, but ascended up into heaven, and seated Himself at His Father's right

hand in our redeemed nature, and that, too, in the admiring presence of all the hosts of light, how could we have fuller evidence of His complete acceptance by His Father, and therefore of His having completely satisfied all His Father's wishes with regard to our redemption? It is not conceivable, nor possible, that Christ should have been so received and honoured by His holy Father, if He had not 'finished the work given him to do.' We conclude therefore, beyond a doubt, that He had so finished it; and in all the highest and accumulated dignities heaped in heaven upon our Saviour, we see the full and blessed proof that He has 'redeemed us to God by his blood.' This is the first conclusion which we draw from His ascension, and a conclusion which ought to give us unspeakable comfort, and 'fill us with joy and peace in believing.'

But next, since 'Jesus Christ is gone into heaven,' we know from other scriptures that He is gone thither, not simply for Himself, but also for us. In Him, therefore, 'we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, who is the propitiation for our sins,' and also our constant intercessor before the eternal throne. There He pleads the merits of His death, and there He obtains gifts for us men, especially the gift of the Holy Spirit, and of all those spiritual benefits and joys which are the work of that Spirit in the soul

of man. Well, therefore, might our Redeemer declare, as He did declare before His ascension, 'It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart I will send him unto you.' We believe, therefore, that now 'Jesus Christ is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God,' He graciously occupies Himself in giving suitable spiritual gifts to all on earth who believe in Him, and pray to the Father in His name. We see, then, the greatest reason to rejoice and be thankful that we have in our Redeemer in heaven one who loves us, who is ever mindful of us, and ever seeking to make His redemption effectual through the Spirit to our sanctification.

And we have further reason for gratitude, when we reflect that His authority in heaven is equal to His good will. Now that He is 'at the right hand of God,' not only are 'angels, and authorities, and powers, made subject unto him,' but 'all power is given unto him in heaven and in earth.' Hence, He can make 'all things work together for good to them that love God' and Him. No adverse powers of devils or of evil men can defeat 'the good pleasure of his will' toward His servants.

And this leads me to observe, in the last place, that Jesus Christ is gone into heaven, not only as our Redeemer and Helper, but also as our Fore-

runner. On this point His Apostle is as clear and express as on any other. Speaking of the unseen world above, 'within the veil,' he says, 'whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus.' Now, if He is the forerunner thither, it follows that others must in due time run thither after Him. And so they will, according to His own gracious covenant with His holy Father. 'Father,' He says in His prayer, 'I will that those whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory.' And those who are given to Him are known by their devotion to His service while they are here on earth. Hence, He says, 'If any man serve me let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be. If any man serve me, him will my Father honour.' Let us bear this thankfully in mind, then, that if we have grace now to render to our Redeemer our upright and affectionate services, He 'is gone into heaven' to 'prepare a place for us,' even for us. And if He is gone to prepare a place for us, He will come again, as He has promised, and receive us unto Himself, that where He is, there we may be also. Neither Christ nor His servants are yet in their final place of rest and enjoyment. He, according to His own parable, is 'gone into a far country, to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return.' 'The heaven has received him until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken of

by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.' But when those times of restitution shall come, then the Lord Jesus 'will be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels,' those 'angels, and principalities, and powers,' which are even now 'subject unto him:' yea, and 'he will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first.' Then, those true Christians 'that are alive and remain on earth, will be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so will they ever be with the Lord, in that new heaven and new earth,' whose 'people will be all righteous, and inherit that land for ever.'

Thus we perceive our Lord's ascension is inseparably connected with His return, as the two angels said: 'This same Jesus, who is now taken up from you into heaven, will in like manner so come as ye have seen him go into heaven.' We are not, therefore, to think of Him as lost, but as gone before. 'We know that our Redeemer liveth,' executing the High Priest's office before God for us, and preparing all of us, who love and serve Him, for that spiritual and heavenly state which He is preparing for us. And when He shall have 'fulfilled in us all the good pleasure of his will, and the work of faith with power;' and when He shall have fulfilled the same in the whole body of

the Church, and shall have 'accomplished the number of his elect, and have hastened his kingdom;' then, and not till then, we, 'with all those that have departed in the true faith of His holy name, shall have our perfect consummation and bliss, both in body and soul, in His eternal and everlasting glory.'

XV.

AFFLICTION BENEFICIAL.

'And they shall comfort you, when ye see their ways and their doings: and ye shall know that I have not done without cause all that I have done in it, saith the Lord God.' —Ezek. xiv. 23.

AT the time when Ezekiel prophesied in his captivity by the river Chebar, in the land of the Chaldeans, the whole nation of the Jews, generally speaking, was in a most corrupt and wicked state; so much so, that the prophet's commission against them was full of 'lamentation, and mourning, and woe.' God had, indeed, great compassion on 'the seed of Abraham his friend,' and 'endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction.' But now He told them plainly by Ezekiel that 'an end was come,' that 'the end was come;' that His sore judgments were just going to fall on His guilty nation; and that they should some of them die of various horrid deaths, and the rest go into miserable captivity, and the whole land be desolate.

Yet, 'in the midst of his just wrath', God, as usual, 'remembered mercy.' He always reserves to

Himself in His Church 'a remnant according to the election of grace;' and He announces such a reserved remnant to His people in the close of the threatening chapter before us. He says, 'Yet behold, therein shall be left a remnant that be brought forth, both sons and daughters; behold, they shall come forth unto you, and ye shall see their ways and their doings: and ye shall be comforted concerning the evil that I have brought upon Jerusalem. And they shall comfort you, when ye see their ways and their doings: and ye shall know that I have not done without cause all that I have done in it, saith the Lord God.'

Here, then, was a promise to the more aged and pious among the Jews already in Chaldea, that when their beloved city Jerusalem should be overthrown, and all sorts of miseries come upon its scattered inhabitants in general, 'a remnant, both of sons and daughters,' should join them in Babylon; and not only join them, but be a comfort to them by their subdued tempers and altered lives, proving that the Lord's correction and discipline had not been without cause, nor lost upon them. In short, God promises that the benefit they derived from the troubles through which they had gone should be so great and so manifest, that all parties could not but take notice of it, and know in their consciences that He had had good reasons for acting towards them in the chastening manner in which

He had acted. And there can be no doubt that what God promised came to pass, and that the surviving remnant became thoroughly aware, and comforted in being aware, how wisely and well God had dealt with them, overruling even their 'great and sore troubles' to their final good. Therefore, in the experience and consciousness of this remnant of the Jews we have a sample of what will, no doubt, be true of the Lord's people at last on the widest scale.

The saved from among men, it is to be feared, are but 'a remnant' in any age and every age; and they, for the most part, only 'through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.' His dealings with them in this world are often as dark as they are afflictive. His suffering children are frequently astonished and perplexed at the sorrows which themselves, and those dear to them, are called to undergo, and are ready to cry out with Job, 'Show me wherefore thou contendest with me.' But let them wait to 'see the end of the Lord;' and then it is certain that they will one day, either in this world or the next, both perceive and acknowledge that 'the Lord was righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works;' and 'did not do, without' good and sufficient 'cause, all that he did' towards them in this vale of tears in the way of correction and discipline. And we cannot suppose that the proceedings of 'the only wise God our Saviour' are more judicious or more gracious at one period

of the world than at another. If, then, 'the remnant of the true Israelites' in Ezekiel's time lived to feel that the Lord was righteous in their strong case, we may rest assured that the conviction and confession of all pious people will, in the upshot of things, be the very same.

Now this is a most important conclusion to arrive at, and a solid ground of contentment, both with regard to ourselves and others. It is impossible to deny that great troubles from time to time do fall upon us—personal troubles, family troubles, national troubles. We experience them to do so, and feel the pressure and urgency of them very much; sometimes, indeed, so much, that, like Jonah, we are ready 'to be angry,' and to 'charge God foolishly.' We think He 'deals hardly with us,' and 'lays affliction upon our loins' more severely than we either deserve or need. We wonder at the variety and accumulation of sorrows that arise to us from ourselves and others, and 'think it strange' that we should be visited with so much chastisement. Our impatience and unbelief reverse the Apostle's declaration, and we are inclined to suspect that God does 'afflict willingly, and grieve the children of men for His pleasure, and not simply for their profit.' 'Thoughts' of this kind 'arise in our hearts' under the visitations of Divine Providence which come upon ourselves, our families, our nation, and our world. We do not at once see

why they come, and come with such severity, in so many ways, and for so long a time. Hence we blindly and sinfully question their fairness and propriety, and are ready to be 'murmurers and complainers.' Now we can well imagine the Jewish remnant in Ezekiel's time to have been for awhile just the same, *i. e.* 'murmurers and complainers' at the dreadful calamities and miseries which had come upon themselves, their children, and their nation in general. And yet we hear God declaring, and no doubt He fulfilled His word, that they should live to see and own that everything which had befallen them was just and good; that there was a just cause for it, and a good end in it and to it. They thoroughly deserved the chastening which they underwent, and nothing less than it would have brought them to repentance and amendment. But to repentance and amendment this did bring them, as was plain by the ways and doings of the remnant that escaped.

Then it was evident that their trouble, however 'great and sore,' had been a blessing to them, even the greatest of blessings; for there is no blessing so great as that of 'being turned away from our iniquities.' The Lord God had acted towards them, not only with wisdom, but with kindness. He had, indeed, put them into the furnace of adversity; but why? Because He found that by no other method could He separate their dross from them, and bring

them forth as 'vessels made to honour,' and 'meet' for His holy service. It was good of Him, therefore, to melt them, even in the hottest fires, rather than leave them unholy and rejected; and when, after their trials, they 'came forth as gold,' they were very sensible how God 'had not done without cause all that He had done in them.'

Seeing, then, that such was the experience of 'the Israel of God' in those days, can we not have a just confidence that such will be the experience of 'the Israel of God' in every age, and therefore in our own? Then let us exercise this confidence, in the first place, with regard to the troubles that befal us in our own persons. That such do and will befal us I take for granted. 'Man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward:' so that, being thus born to it, we must meet with it in different ways and degrees. In general, 'the heart knoweth its own bitterness,' and we alone are fully aware of 'the multitude of the sorrows which we have in our heart.' They arise to us from various causes, of mind, body, and estate. They pertain to things temporal and to things spiritual; to things present, things past, and things to come. Their pressure is by no means equally great at all times; but it is great enough sometimes to put our patience and faith to a severe trial. We are tempted to complain of our case as a hard one, and to think that we are disciplined in a harsh and unnecessary

manner. Now against these 'evil surmises,' these 'fiery darts of the wicked one,' we ought to recal and set the suggestion of the text, that 'God does not do without cause all that He does in us.' Is there not a sufficient reason for the trouble, be it what it may, which we undergo? 'Surely,' says the Scripture, 'it is meet to be said unto God, I have borne chastisement; I will not offend any more.'

It seems, then, our chastisement comes upon us for our offences. This is the uniform declaration of holy writ,—'Thou with rebukes dost chasten man for sin.' We all have sinned—in various degrees, it is true; but we all have sinned, and so sinned as to deserve the rod that has been laid upon us. To say otherwise is to charge God with injustice, and 'how then shall God judge the world?' 'Shall not the Judge of all the world do right?' 'He is the rock, his work is perfect: all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he.' Such is the statement of Scripture, and it commends itself to our understanding and to our conscience. 'Our times are in God's hands.' Nothing happens to us by chance. 'His never-failing providence orders all things both in heaven and earth,' and therefore orders the sort and degree of trouble which falls on us respectively as a correction for our sins. To murmur, therefore, at our particular correction is

to imply that we do not deserve it, and therefore that God is unjust in our case.

Now to say this were impious, and our conscience will not let us openly make such a charge against God. Our conscience, then, ought to restrain us from the indulgence of a murmuring thought. Our conscience ought to suggest to us under our troubles, what it suggested to Nehemiah under his: 'Howbeit thou, Lord, art righteous in all that is come upon us: for thou hast done right, but we have done wickedly.' And the more we think on our past 'ways and doings,' and examine them in the light of Scripture, the more we shall be convinced that 'all that God has done to us He has not done without cause in this respect,' viz. that He had just reason to correct us. But if we 'humble ourselves under his mighty hand,' and 'accept of the punishment of our iniquity,' and 'turn to him that smites us,' and endeavour, 'where we have done iniquity to do no more,' it may be equally plain to us by-and-by that God did not afflict us without cause in this respect also, that He meant our correction for good to us, and not for harm. By His prophet Jeremiah He said of old time to His suffering people, 'I know the thoughts which I think toward you, thoughts of good, and not of evil, to give you an expected end.' He thinks the same toward all His afflicted servants that 'know the rod, and who has appointed

it.' 'As many as He loves He rebukes and chastens.' Our troubles are ordered and sent by Him with a benevolent view, with a gracious design. He seeks by them to bring us to think on our sins, and perceive their evil, and turn from them with godly sorrow. He seeks by them to make us turn to Him, the alone fountain of life and comfort. He seeks by them to bring us to a settled moderation of temper with regard to things of this world, and to make us ready, by habits of piety, integrity, and submission, for 'the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.' And it is quite plain that these, and many other valuable effects, are actually produced in afflicted Christians by means of the personal chastening which they undergo.

Hence, instead of repining at the cup of trouble or sorrow, be it what it may, which is put into our hand, let us regard it always as one of bitter, it may be, but still of wholesome medicine. Let us say with our adorable Lord and Pattern, 'The cup which my Father hath given me to drink, shall I not drink it?' and let us drink it off, only prayerful and solicitous that it may produce in us those healthful ends for which it is sent. It is certain that God can make the most nauseous medicines in nature beneficial to our health, and so can He make the most afflictive dispensations of His providence productive of good. Therefore, let us take

patiently the trouble that comes upon us, and be mainly intent to derive spiritual advantage from it. Unquestionably it is sent in mercy, to make us mend 'our ways and our doings;' and if it has this good effect upon us, even in some degree, we should 'be comforted concerning the evil that is brought upon us, and know that God has not done without cause all that He has done in us.'

In like manner we may often find reason to comfort ourselves with regard to the troubles laid upon our families and friends. We know it was 'the good figs,' the more pious portion of the Jewish remnant, who were carried first to Babylon; and it must naturally have been a great distress to them to see their more obstinate families and friends, whom they had left in Jerusalem, undergoing there the utmost severity of Divine correction. Still, when the small number that escaped thence joined them in Babylon, so manifestly improved by their afflictions, they would be comforted over them, and acknowledge, with joy and gratitude, that 'it was good for them to have been in trouble,' since thereby 'they had learned God's statutes.'

And now, in our day, we frequently find cause for thankfulness, as well as pity, in the troubles that come upon those dear to us. We naturally lament to see them 'pass under the rod,' and suffer in a variety of ways and degrees, because 'God's hand presses them sore.' But when we also see

them take, it may be, their sickness patiently, or their disappointments meekly, or their losses and crosses calmly; when we see their tempers subdued, their piety increased, their whole behaviour to God and man visibly improved and Christianised, it is impossible not to be 'comforted over them,' and confess that 'God has not done without cause all that He has done in them also.' 'The end of the Lord,' the beneficial end, reconciles us at last to the means, the painful means. The bitterness is extracted in a great measure from that cup which we see produces such salutary results.

And observing how 'from seeming evil God educes good' to individuals and to families, we are enabled to ascend to the comfortable persuasion that such will be the case on the great scale of a nation, and even of the world. If we have thoughtful and humane minds, we must needs compassionate the losses and miseries endured at times by such a vast number of our fellow-creatures. We can reconcile ourselves to them only by steadfastly believing that they are sent, or permitted, by the great God, whose 'tender mercies are over all his works,' and who could have prevented the occurrence of these sorrows if He had thought it better so to do. But He did not. He has His reasons, good and benevolent reasons, for affliction, whether it be done 'against a nation or against a man only.' It is certain He loved the

nation of the Jews, and loves it still, and yet never was nation more grievously afflicted by Him. After one of its worst afflictions, however, that nation 'knew that God had not done without cause all that he had done in it.' And, no doubt, it will one day know the same, when it shall emerge from its present sea of troubles, and 'all Israel shall be saved.' Therefore let us have faith in God, however grievously He may correct our nation, or the whole human family. He loves His creatures infinitely better than we can love them, and we need not fear but His power and wisdom and goodness will do with them and for them as, on the whole, is discreetest and best. Here, therefore, let us rest, and pray Him to deal kindly with both ourselves and them, that, rescued finally from all our sins, and all our troubles, we may for ever praise and bless the God of our salvation.

XVI.

MAN PLEADING WITH HIS MAKER.

'Thy hands have made me: and fashioned me, give me understanding, that I may learn thy commandments.'—Ps. cxix. 73.

THIS 119th Psalm is, in a high degree, the language of direct communion with God. In it the Psalmist 'set the Lord always before him,' so much so that almost every verse is a fervent prayer, and a fervent prayer for some great spiritual benefit. He uses all sorts of arguments and pleas before his God, apparently with Jacob's determination,—'I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.' There is, however, one blessing which, in this psalm, he seems to have desired above all others. For it he prays in every variety of supplication, and urges a multitude of reasons why it should not be withheld from him: I mean, the blessing of a spiritual understanding, of a power rightly and truly to 'learn God's commandments.' Hear how he 'fills his mouth with arguments' for this inestimable benefit: 'Blessed art thou, O Lord: teach me thy statútes.' 'I am a stranger in the earth; O hide not thy commandments from me.' 'Thou art

good, and doest good: teach me thy statutes.' 'The earth, O Lord, is full of thy mercy: O teach me thy statutes.' 'I am thy servant; give me understanding, that I may know thy testimonies.' 'The righteousness of thy testimonies is everlasting: O give me understanding, and I shall live.' These are some of the many pleas for a spiritual understanding which he urges up and down the Psalm, and in the text he urges another plea, to which we will now direct our more particular attention: 'Thy hands have made me, and fashioned me: give me understanding, that I may learn thy commandments.'

Let us consider, first, the force of this plea; and then the propriety of our also personally urging it in our own behalf.

The text is the language of man pleading with his Maker, not to leave unfinished a great and good work which He had bountifully begun. 'Thy hands have made me, and fashioned me: O give me understanding, that I may learn thy commandments.' Here the experience of some of God's power, and skill, and kindness, is turned into a plea for experiencing the remainder.

The argument is from less to greater. 'Thou hast done much for me already: therefore do more. To thee I am indebted for all that I have: to thee, therefore, I come for that which I desire, but have not, or have it not to the extent that I desire,

Thou hast done great things for my body, but I want greater things done for my soul; and done, I hope the latter will be, because the former are. Thou hast been the Father of my flesh, which is the reason I come to Thee to be the Father of my spirit. I am a monument of "Thy marvellous loving-kindness" in things natural and temporal: I would fain be so of Thy yet more "marvellous loving-kindness" in things spiritual and eternal.'

This is the force of the Psalmist's plea in the text: and now let us consider the propriety of our also personally using it. It evidently suits our circumstances, as much as it did David's. We have the same need, and the same ground, to use it, that he had.

1st. We have the same need to use it. If David had not spiritual understanding, or had it not to the extent that was desirable, so neither have we. The most advanced among us will hardly presume ourselves to be better than 'the man after God's own heart.' In truth, the more advanced we are, the more sensible we are rendered of our short-comings. The more light has shone into our hearts, the more it has made our remaining darkness visible to ourselves. It is self-ignorance that alone suffers any person to be puffed up with self-conceit. Laodiceans might say, 'We are rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing;' but then the cause of their saying so was self-

ignorance: they knew not that they were blind. How should a man born blind know how blind he is, when he has never known any other state than blindness?' But let his eyes be opened, and then he will presently say, 'One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see.' The sweet entrance of light makes manifest to him his former darkness.

And similar is the case with persons in spiritual things. While they are spiritually blind they are confident that they see; and when they really see, they become aware of their past blindness. While they are ignorant of God's commandments they think they know them, but when 'the eyes of their understanding become enlightened,' then they feel their need to learn them. So true are St. Paul's words, 'If any man thinketh that he knoweth anything, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know.' 'If any man among you seemeth to be wise, let him become a fool, that he may be wise.' 'Seest thou,' says Solomon, 'a man wise in his own conceit? There is more hope of a fool than of him.' He has no motive for exerting himself to become what he flatters himself he is already: whereas he, who is sensible of his ignorance, it may be hoped will take pains to get it removed. Hence, self-knowledge, or, in other words, knowledge of our ignorance, lies at the root of our acquaintance with the things of God. The real work of the

Spirit early shows itself in persons becoming painfully conscious of their past dark and dull state. When the Spirit of God is going to build a temple for Himself, he digs deep into the heart where it is to be built. He knows that if persons are to be eminent in piety, they must first be thoroughly grounded in humility. He knows they will never resound the high praises of God, unless they feel that 'by His grace they are what they are.' Tendering, therefore, His own glory, and their happiness, He shows them themselves, that He may show them Himself. He convinces them of their emptiness, that they may seek His fulness. He humbles them under a sense of their ignorance and weakness, that they may both crave wisdom and strength from Him, and be thankful when they are granted. He had effectually wrought this humbling work in the Psalmist, and that is the reason we hear 'the man after God's own heart,' expressing himself as if he were a little child. And he only expresses himself as he felt himself. He was a little child; and we know who has said to us, 'Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of God.'

Now, then, have we been converted from self-conceit to humility, from self-confidence to 'lowliness of mind?' Are we 'become as little children' in tractableness and docility, feeling ourselves like

them in point of power or knowledge in spiritual things? I know not how you do feel; I only know how you ought to feel, how we all ought to feel, viz. that we cannot 'learn God's commandments' unless He graciously 'give us understanding' that we may do so. We are, indeed, of ourselves, as Jeremiah says, 'wise enough to do evil;' but 'to do good we have no knowledge,' till God 'gives us understanding.' As I remarked before, we are not better than David: so if even he needed that 'God should make him understand wisdom secretly,' certainly we must all need the same. If he wanted Divine teaching under the Jewish dispensation, we want it just the same under the Christian dispensation. Christ was obliged to 'open the understandings' even of His elect Apostles before they could 'understand the Scriptures.' And St. Paul continually prayed for those who were already converted, that 'the eyes of their understanding might be enlightened.' Indeed the great promise of the New Testament in the blood of Christ was the gift of the Holy Spirit for this very purpose of spiritual illumination. Before He suffered Jesus said, 'When he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth.' Accordingly, when our Saviour 'had been by the right hand of God exalted, and received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he shed forth' the influence of that Spirit abundantly on

our nether world. Then were the eyes of the blind opened, and the lame walked. Persons in great numbers, who had been 'heady and high-minded,' became 'pricked in their heart,' became humble, became conscious of ignorance, became desirous to be taught; were taught—'taught of the Lord,' taught 'the truth as it is in Jesus,' and so taught it that they had a heart to it, a heart to understand it, a heart to love it, a heart to obey it, a heart to enjoy it. In short, 'they walked in the light of truth, till at length they attained to the light of everlasting life.'

Such was the experience of thousands and tens of thousands in primitive times. And we are persons 'of like passions with them.' We are as 'foolish and disobedient' by nature as they: by grace we may be as wise and tractable as they. What Spirit they needed and had, the same Spirit do we need, and may have. 'The same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him.' Therefore, let us call upon Him to 'give us understanding, that we may learn His commandments.' This was the petition which the Psalmist urged in the text; and we have seen that we have just the same reason to urge it as he had.

Now, therefore, let me observe, 2ndly, that we have the same ground on which to urge it as he had. For could he say to God, 'Thy hands have made me, and fashioned me: O give me under-

standing, that I may learn thy commandments;' we can say just the same. We are as much 'the offspring of God' as he was. 'Have we not all one Father? Hath not one God created us? Did not he that made him in the womb make us? Did not one fashion us in the womb?' My brethren, we may each look at ourselves, and then look up to God and say, 'Thy hands have made me and fashioned me.' And, 'I am fearfully and wonderfully made:' 'marvellous are thy works, and that my soul knoweth right well.' David felt this of his own person, and we ought to feel it of ours; and feeling it, we should make it, as he did, a ground of pleading with God, that since He has done such wonders in our body, He would do yet greater wonders in our soul. 'Thy hands have made me and fashioned me: give me understanding, that I may learn thy commandments.'

This is a good plea in three respects: it is solid, touching, and honourable. 1st, it is a solid plea. There is real and great weight in it. The creature pleads with its Creator, that, as He had graciously done something for it, He would graciously do more: and this is a reasonable plea. All unasked-for kindness naturally begets in the recipient an opinion of the good-will of him that bestowed it. Now our creation was an act of unasked-for kindness. We could not ask for our being when we had no being. Our creation,

therefore, was an act of free goodness on the part of God. 'He giveth to all men life, and breath, and all things.' Hence, in that He made us, He must have had good-will towards us. 'He hateth nothing that he hath made,' or why did He make it? The Lord 'rejoices in his work.' Then, if God so loved us as freely to do something for us, why should we distrust His being ready to do more? Why did He act toward us in a manner directly calculated to inspire us with hope, unless He indeed meant that we should hope in Him? We think it unprincipled in our fellow-creatures to raise expectations which they never meant to satisfy; and shall we think that God would be guilty of what we should deem perfidious even in man? But has not our creation raised in us expectations from God? Certainly it has. It could not do otherwise. It was not intended to do otherwise. On the contrary, the very circumstance of our creation was intended to make us have the liveliest trust and hope in our Creator. He, having been good enough to give life, why should He not, with it, also freely give us all things requisite to its enjoyment in perfection? But the perfect enjoyment of life is inseparable from the knowledge and favour of Him who gave it. 'This is life eternal, that we may know the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent.' Unless, therefore, God our Saviour be pleased to reveal Himself to us as

our Father and Friend, and cause us to know Him as our eternal and exceeding great reward, we can never thoroughly enjoy the life He has given to us. 'In his favour is life.' By nature we have lost His favour by sin. Unless, therefore, He restore us to His favour by restoring us to His image, we can never be happy. The plea, then, advanced in the text is a solid plea.

And next, it is a touching plea. What can our Creator say to us humbly urging such a plea? How can He resist it? He knows that 'his hands made us;' and not made us only, in a rough and hasty manner, but 'fashioned us' with deliberate patience and consummate skill. He knows that He was 'great in counsel' as well as 'wonderful in working' at our formation. 'God said, Let us make man in our own image, after our likeness.' 'So God created man in his own image; in the image of God created he him.' This is no common language about no common operation. And if the formation of our first parents was such a matter of consideration to God, so is also the formation of each one of their descendants. No human being is an object of indifference to the Most High. On the contrary we all are objects of His respect, to an extent that made the Psalmist exclaim with surprise, 'Lord, what is man that thou hast such respect unto him, or the son of man that thou so regardest him?' Indeed, so great is the love of

God to us, that nothing but extraordinary provokingness on our part can make Him 'turn to be our enemy, and fight against us.' It was not till the first world 'grieved God at his heart' that He could be induced to say, 'I will destroy man whom I have created.' And in this world they were incorrigible sinners of whom Isaiah was allowed to speak in these terms: 'He that made them will not have mercy on them, and he that formed them will show them no favour.' Had it been possible for them to find favour or mercy at all, they would certainly have found it from their Maker and Former. Even over those whom, for their hardness and impenitent heart, His justice must consign to perdition, He feels the yearnings of pity. 'He endures with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction,' and swears by His great Self that He has no pleasure in their death. When such is the tenderness of Him with whom we have to do, we cannot wonder that an appeal to Him, as having 'made and fashioned' us, should be a touching appeal. The inspired Psalmist knew that it was when he made it: indeed, he made it because he knew it was. He was intent to obtain his petition, and therefore advanced the most touching plea he could.

And lastly, it is an honourable plea: 'Give me understanding, that I may learn thy commandments.' It is for the honour of God that we should

learn His commandments so thoroughly as to do them. 'Herein is our Father glorified, if we bear much fruit.' We may, then, honourably plead for that which, if granted, will be for the honour of Him that grants it. The stronger is our plea for such a favour, the more does it become us. Hence, we shall do well to 'put God in remembrance' that 'his hands have made and fashioned us,' because their having done so is the strongest reason for His enabling us by His grace to glorify Him. When, in the 60th of Isaiah, He speaks of making people righteous, He calls them 'the work of his hands, that he may be glorified.' He always intended that the beings whom He made should 'glorify' their Maker, 'both in their bodies and in their spirits, which are his.' Our bodies do, in some sense, visibly glorify Him by their wonderful structure; and yet they dishonour Him oftentimes by the sinful uses to which we apply that structure. And our so sinfully applying it arises from our sinful spirit within us. It must be made 'a right spirit within us,' before we shall be inclined and able to 'present our bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is our reasonable service.' Every time, therefore, we look at our admirably constructed bodies, and think how we abuse them to purposes dishonourable to the Maker of them, we are furnished with a plea on which to urge God to 'give us understanding, that we may

learn his commandments,' and learn from them, and through them, not to desecrate His workmanship in the way we do. Our bodies will never subserve the promotion of His glory as they ought, till they are inhabited by a righteous soul. If we would 'cleanse ourselves from all the filthiness of the flesh,' we must cleanse ourselves from all that 'of the spirit' first. It is the spirit within us that is the earliest offender. 'Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts,' before evil words proceed out of the mouth, or evil deeds out of other members of our body. Our effectual dedication, therefore, of our person to the service of our Lord can be brought about only by having our souls hallowed.

And we must be 'sanctified by the truth.' Hence the importance of our having clear views of 'the truth as it is in Jesus,' and a thorough understanding of the nature and excellence of God's commandments. A distinct perception that they are 'holy, and just, and good,' is indispensable to our delighting in them. And till we delight in them we shall never 'learn' them, in the sense in which David learnt them. 'He opened his mouth, and drew in his breath; for his delight was in God's commandments.' He inhaled them as the fresh breeze of heaven. He said, 'Thy word is very pure: therefore thy servant loveth it.' Now to have such strong convictions of the healthiness (so to speak) of the Scriptures, requires an enlightened

and spiritual understanding. Through the gift of such an understanding only can any of us ever see, in the affecting and influential manner which is desirable, how 'all God's commandments concerning all things are right, and how all false ways are to be utterly abhorred.' For this gift, then, let us ever pray—all of us, if we have it not at all; and if we have it in some degree, that we may have it more abundantly. All really clear views of truth tend to purify our conduct, and to 'preserve our whole body, and soul, and spirit blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.' Which being the case, as the petition in the text is triply good, solid, touching, and honourable, let us get it into our thoughts and hearts till we can urge it feelingly at the throne of grace, and then we shall urge it profitably. It is a singular petition, the force of which, though not perhaps striking at first, grows more apparent the more we ponder and ruminate upon it. And the plea urged in the petition has this great advantage, that it is a plea we always carry about with us, and which presents itself to our senses. We can always look at ourselves and reflect, 'God made me and fashioned me;' and for what? That, through the blindness that is in me, I should abuse these fair limbs 'as instruments of unrighteousness' unto sin, and plunge my whole body at last into hell? Oh, no! I am 'the work of his hands, that he might be

glorified' in me. Therefore let me seek 'good understanding and knowledge,' that I may 'yield myself unto God, as one who is alive from the dead, and my members as instruments of righteousness unto God.'

XVII.

THE FATHER OF THE FATHERLESS.

'When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up.'—Ps. xxvii. 10.

DAVID is honourably called in Scripture 'the man after God's own heart;' and that chiefly, I suppose, on account of his singular confidence in his Maker. Childlike simplicity of affiance in God is, of all dispositions, the one which He loves, as His word testifies,—'The Lord's delight is in them that fear him, and put their trust in his mercy.' The title of the psalm before us is this, 'David sustaineth his faith.' Faith in God receives many a shock in this world of disorder, perplexity, and trial. His children are oftentimes 'for a season, if need be, in heaviness through manifold temptations,' or trials; 'that the trial of their faith being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, may be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.'

Since, then, many things occur which tend to shake and stagger the faith of pious persons, they have abundant reason to sustain their faith by

whatever considerations they can find most effectual to that end. And perhaps, under heavy blows of adversity and dejection, nothing so establishes and secures a believer as a recollection of the support he has actually received from God under former trials. Experience of past help naturally engenders hope of future help; and the remembrance of former mercies received is a believer's best, and perhaps only sensible, buoy, which keeps him from sinking. 'We are saved by hope,' said the great Apostle, who felt he should be overwhelmed without it. And in the latter end of this very psalm David adds, 'I should have fainted, but that I believe verily to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living;' *i.e.* not merely in the world beyond the grave, but here in this present state of existence. The Psalmist was sustaining his faith, not simply in the final goodness of God to him in a future state, about which he had a calm and abiding confidence, but he was sustaining his faith about this matter, that he should live to experience and be sensible of the kindness of God to him even in this earthly scene of things. And Christian believers should keep up their faith also in the same particular, and believe that they too shall see 'the goodness of the Lord in this land of the living.'

It is true that temporal mercies were more pointedly guaranteed to the children of God under the Mosaic than they are under the Christian dis-

pensation. St. Paul's great thanksgiving to God touching Christians is, because He has 'blessed them with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.' But they are blessed, and mentioned as blessed, with spiritual blessings in eminence above temporal blessings, not to the exclusion of them. 'Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come.' And Christians, no less than Jews, if pious people, are allowed to believe, and authorised to expect, that though 'the young lions do lack and suffer hunger, they that seek the Lord shall want no manner of thing that is good.'

But from these general, though not irrelevant observations, it is time we should come to the more distinct consideration of the text: 'When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up.' Not improbably the Psalmist wrote these words when he was yet but a young man. The second and third verses seem to allude to his experience in the wilderness, when he had lately been delivered out of the hands of Saul; and we know that he was a young man then. Now, as a sensible and pious young man, he felt the value of a father's counsel and of a mother's kindness. Whatever foolish and self-conceited children may think to the contrary, they will never find, ordinarily speaking, any human beings who will love them, and care for them, and counsel them, and

comfort them, like their parents. These 'naturally care for their state;' and natural affection is the last good feeling that can die away out of parental hearts. In the happily overwhelming majority of instances, 'the glory of children are their fathers' and mothers; and not only so, but upon them 'the glory is a defence:' *i.e.* 'parents are the guardians, as well as ornaments, of their children.' Hence for children to lose either parent, and much more both, is, of all earthly losses, one of the most serious. Of such a double loss David would seem to have been apprehensive when he wrote the psalm before us. We know that Jesse 'went among men for an old man' in the days of Saul, and probably his wife also was 'well stricken in years.' Hence 'the graves were ready for them,' and they were ready for their graves. The Psalmist saw that, in addition to his other sorrows, he should soon have to meet the sorrow of losing 'the guides of his youth;' and at the foresight of such a loss 'he was much moved.'

The filial respect and piety of the Old Testament saints is very remarkable, and a pattern for children in these days. The young men of old 'after God's own heart' were not wont to feel, when they grew up, that they might treat their father or their mother with less honour. When the commandment said, 'Honour thy father and thy mother,' they did not observe it said how long they were to do so. Hence they honoured them,

not merely till they were one-and-twenty, but so long as they had a father or mother to honour. Whether we look at Joseph, or at David, or at our Saviour, whatever were their age, we see in them no diminution of reverential fondness for their aged parents. To confine ourselves to the contemplation of the Psalmist's feelings, when he found himself bereaved, or on the point of being bereaved, of his father and his mother, 'his heart within him was desolate.' Under all his troubles, his home had ever been to him a source of comforting meditation. He knew that there, at least, he had those who daily cared both for his soul and body, ready to caress and counsel him when he could be present with them, and lifting up holy hands for him when he was far away among the ambushes of the wilderness or the open dangers of the battle-field; and the thought of his friends 'did him good like a medicine.'

In proportion, then, as he had been wont to stay himself on them, he felt a shaking of heart and a tottering of step now that his comfortable supports were just being withdrawn. What, then, did he lean upon to support him in their stead? He trusted in the compassion of that God who had given him his parents at first, and who was now taking them away. He said, in the humble boldness of faith, 'When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up.'

Bereaved of my best earthly friends, I shall be bereaved: but I shall not be left an orphan. I have a confidence there is One who will come to me, and put underneath me His 'everlasting arms.' 'I know whom I have believed:' 'Thou, O God, hast taught' and helped 'me from my youth up' by my parents, and now I depend on Thee to teach and help me without them.

Thus 'the sweet Psalmist of Israel' is a pattern to us of pious trust in God under circumstances of bereavement and destitution. And it is well that we have such patterns in Scripture. They are imitable, and they are recorded for our imitation. What gives the Bible its great value is, that it contains an inspired, and therefore not overdrawn account, how holy men of God behaved under trials the very same as those which we ourselves are summoned to endure. They were 'men of like passions' with us, and having their various feelings called into exercise, under circumstances just like our own. The Scripture characters were natural characters, and they are painted before us on the page of inspiration in the most natural manner. And they were also good characters, made so by the grace of God; and their piety and worth were of the most genuine, and unaffected, and winning kind. In order to our being 'men after God's own heart,' we have only to be such as they were in spirit and conduct, when we come to be placed under like circum-

stances of trial. They lived, not in another world, but in this world. They had events befalling them, not widely different from those befalling us, but precisely similar to them. They had human feelings to be affected by these events, and they had the same God with ourselves to flee unto in trouble: 'Lord, thou hast been our refuge in all generations.'

Hence let me remind you of these two things: 1st, That all of us in turn need a refuge from trouble; and 2ndly, That our proper refuge is in God.

1st. All of us in turn need a refuge from trouble. It is not as if peradventure we may escape trouble. Escape it we cannot; escape it we shall not. It is the sure and certain consequence of our being fallen sinners in a disordered world. 'Man is born to trouble,' naturally and necessarily, 'as the sparks fly upward.' Among other troubles we are born to this, and 'it is a sore trouble'—we are born to the loss, sooner or later, of our dearest relatives and best friends. This world is always a fluctuating scene of things. 'One generation passeth away, and another cometh.' Death, death, is always before our eyes. People are being 'carried away from us, as with a flood.' The stream of time rolls on, ingulfing here and there the infantile and the young, but ever bearing down the aged and infirm. 'God prevaileth against them, and they pass; He

changeth their countenance and sendeth them away.' Tears are being continually shed for the disruption of domestic ties, and for 'the separation of chief friends;' 'and the mourners go about the street.'

And what adds unspeakably to the calamities of life is, that parents and friends are perpetually being hurried away from young families who can ill spare them. We are all born into this world extremely feeble and dependent creatures. The Scripture truly says, 'We hang then upon our mothers' breasts.' Were 'mothers to forget their sucking children, and not have compassion on the sons of their womb,' ill must it fare with those so ushered into this fallen world. Without a mother's nurture and a father's toil young families would be indeed forlorn. And yet in this forlorn state multitudes of orphans are actually left. Their father and their mother forsake them—forsake them wickedly sometimes, though seldom—forsake them continually through compulsion, through death. 'The king of terrors' comes into their houses, and obliges them to 'forsake all that they have,' even their children.

Thus numbers are left on this wide world, who know not, or forget, what it is to say, 'My father, my mother.' Numbers, again, are deprived of their parents at years of understanding indeed, but only thereby to be the more sensible of their calamity.

It is difficult to say at what age children are most susceptible of advantage from their parents' lives, and therefore of most loss from their deaths. 'Nursing fathers and nursing mothers' are all but indispensable to their offspring. And when education must begin, who are like parents for 'training up the child in the way it should go?' And as young families shoot into maturity, a mother's care and a father's industry seem more wanted than ever. And when the child is fully grown up into the companion, and must be ushered into the society and business of the world, then is the very time he can best appreciate and most profit by parental kindness, and by parental wisdom. When the father and the mother is merged in the friend, there is no friend like him and her—none who will so strengthen their young friends by 'the sweetness of hearty counsel.' 'A new friend is like new wine,' says the wise man: 'when it is old, thou shalt drink it with pleasure.'

Thus the death of parents, whenever it may occur, is a severe loss to all children, and especially if the two parties have loved one another with a spiritual superadded to a natural affection. True religion softens the heart, refines the feelings, and therefore cements the attachment of virtuous relatives. No earthly attachments are so strong and tender as those of relations who love one another 'in the Lord.' Filial piety has ever been most

marked in children who have feared God. Hence exemplary young people are apt to suffer most under bereavements. When 'their father and their mother forsake them,' they 'sorrow; not, indeed, as others that have no hope:' but if their sorrow is less passionate, it is more keen; if less loud, more deep; if less vehement, more lasting. Pious children have the most enlightened views and the soundest judgment, as well as the purest affections. Hence they are aware, more than others, what they have lost in losing those on whom they could securely lean in a world where there are so many 'broken reeds, whereon if a man lean they will go into his hand and pierce it.' The Psalmist lived to prove, in the most grievous manner, that not every one in whom he trusted was a Jesse to him. He found not a parent's faithfulness in his eldest child Ammon, or in his favourite child Absalom, or in 'his own familiar friend Ahithophel. When he felt himself betrayed in such quarters, he would then think with affectionate regret of that father and that mother who betrayed him never. And perhaps children seldom understand the worth of parents till they have lost them, and come to find their superior value by contrast with the inferiority of the friends who succeed them. There are friends—rare indeed, but not unknown—who, when death has broken in upon families, and left them orphans, 'stand in the gap,' and almost fill up the place of

parents: but such friends do not present themselves at every turn. Generally speaking, the loss of parents is not to be repaired to children by any earthly friends. When it occurs, the bereaved have little left but to retire, and weep, and 'look upwards.' And recollect, you especially that are young, that all of you either are thus bereaved or will be. Your father and your mother either have forsaken you or will. 'There is this one event' to all children, if they live—they will feel the sorrow of being left by those by whom 'they have been holden up ever since they were born.' This trouble is certain to befall you that are young, if it has not befallen you already; and all of you in turn are sure to need a refuge from this trouble. This is what I had to observe in the first place.

And now let me observe, 2ndly, that in such circumstances your proper refuge is in God. To Him David fled when he was abandoned by his father and his mother, and to the same you should flee when you are abandoned by yours. He has graciously proclaimed Himself 'the Father of the fatherless,' on purpose that orphans might be encouraged to trust in Him. It is a good old saying, that 'man's extremity is God's opportunity;' a truth which is never more applicable than in the case of orphans. They, of all persons, seem the most forlorn; therefore they, of all persons, are

most particularly under the care of Heaven. 'The Father of mercies' is not ignorant, nor forgetful, that He it was who took from them their earthly parents for wisest reasons; but if He deprived them of 'fathers of their flesh,' it was with a purpose Himself to become in a more especial manner their heavenly parent. They seem peculiarly committed to His care by the very circumstance of their destitution. 'The Lord upholdeth all such as fall, and lifteth up all those that are down.' His compassion rises in proportion to the exigence. And as nothing can exceed the exigence of orphans, 'his compassions' for them 'fail not.' And He wonderfully makes it plain to the world that they fail not. Judging according to human probabilities, those whose father and mother have forsaken them have oftentimes no apparent support, or at least are likely to suffer most serious inconvenience. And yet provision somehow arises for them, and the reasonably dreaded evils are either averted or softened; and that in such repeated instances, and in so marked a manner, that 'whoso are wise, and will observe these things, they may understand the loving-kindness of the Lord.' It is not the less really His loving-kindness because the fatherless are sustained and comforted in a natural manner. It is not the way of God to work miracles, when He can 'fulfil all the good pleasure of His will' without them. Besides, it

should be remembered that the course of nature is the course of God; for He put nature in her course, and keeps her in it. And her steady pursuit of that course is, when thoughtfully considered, one of the most miraculous, at least one of the most wonderful as well as beneficent, of all miracles. It is, so to speak, a standing and daily miracle how God 'giveth food to all flesh, for his mercy endureth for ever.'

We cannot sufficiently admire the power with 'which he openeth his hand, and filleth all things living with plenteousness.' Did we properly reflect how continuously 'he feedeth the hungry,' 'satisfying the desire of every living thing,' down from invisible archangels to invisible insects, we should easily conclude that 'nothing is too hard for the Lord;' and hence, that with Him it is always practicable to provide for the fatherless. 'The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof,' and from that He can supply their earthly wants. Also, 'all the whole heaven is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof;' and out of the fulness which is in Christ He can supply all their spiritual wants. All hearts also are in His hand; and He can support the weak by the ministry of angels, or the ministry of men, with equal facility. And when Omnipotent Benevolence is pledged, and pleased to put itself forth in behalf of the fatherless, no wonder if it be exclaimed, 'What hath God wrought!' and 'all men

do marvel.' 'Show thy marvellous loving-kindness,' says David, 'thou that art the Saviour of all that trust in thee.' And certainly if the bereaved have grace to trust Him, with the Psalmist, that 'when their father and their mother forsake them, then the Lord will take them up,' He will never disappoint their childlike expectations: for His word of promise to every such believing orphan is this, at the end of the 91st Psalm, 'Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him up, because he hath known my name. He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and bring him to honour. With long life will I satisfy him, and show him my salvation.'

Let me conclude, then, with an application of the whole subject to different classes. And, 1st, to you young people whose father and mother have not yet forsaken you, but are mercifully spared you for your guardianship and support. You have the most valuable of earthly parents now, but prepare to lose them. Lose them you must, if first they lose not you. As surely as your life is prolonged you will see the death of those nearest, and, I hope, dearest to you here below. And have you thought what you will do when they forsake you? Have you thought whither you can betake yourselves when you can no longer resort to a father's house or a mother's side? Have you thought where

you will find counsel and comfort when parental eyes that ever beamed kindness upon you, and parental lips that ever taught you wisdom, are closed in the grave?

The time must come when, if you live, your home of youth will be your home no longer—when it will be 'left unto you desolate;' and, bereft of those on whom you have leaned from earliest childhood, you will feel the strange feeling of standing alone. You may have other relatives, and perhaps worthy ones; but you will then have no father, no mother, and no relative like them. You will find no second parents here on earth. You will 'look too low, if you look beneath the skies.' There is but One who can be to you father, mother, everything; and that is God. When your best friends here 'forsake you,' He alone can 'take you up.' But will He take you up when you are forsaken, as forsaken you must be? Did He take David up? He did. But are you like David? When young, he was even then 'after God's own heart.' Are you the same, now that you are young? It is true God has 'no respect of persons;' but He has great respect to character. You must never think otherwise. He had respect to 'righteous Abel, and to his offering;' but to wicked 'Cain, and to his offering, he had not respect.' He had respect to David; but He had no respect to Saul.

Consider, then, betimes what is your character—like that of Abel, or that of Cain? like that of David, or that of Saul? If, young though you be in years, you are old in sin, should you suddenly become destitute, there will be no refuge for you in God. His promise is, not that His aliens, but that His children shall have a 'place of refuge.' You must obey God in prosperity, if you would have Him support you in adversity. 'Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth, before 'the evil days come,' when you will want Him to remember you in your 'low estate.' Avail yourselves of the advantages you have from the merciful prolongation of your parents' lives. In particular, 'honour your father and your mother, which is the first commandment with promise,' under the Christian as well as under the Jewish dispensation. And that you may obey your parents aright, learn, as St. Paul directs you, to 'obey them in the Lord, for this is right.' 'Obey' them; and not 'obey' them only, but 'honour' them, upon the Lord's authority, for the Lord's sake, and after the Lord's example. Submit your will to His, and 'requite your parents,' because it is His pleasure you should, and because His pleasure should be your pleasure. 'The love of Christ should constrain you to do always those things which please him.' And how much filial piety will please Him you may judge from His own example. In mid

youth 'he went down with his parents unto Nazareth, and was subject unto them:' and the respectful tenderness of His early days He continued feeling to His latest hour. Amid His dying agonies on the cross He was mindful of His weeping mother, and effectually provided for her wants. Do you, then, set yourselves to 'show piety at home, and requite your parents.' While you have them, 'love, honour, and succour them, in God and for God, according to His blessed word and ordinance;' and then you may cheerfully hope that, when they 'forsake you,' as soon they must, with whatever reluctance on their part, 'the Lord will take you up.'

And now, 2ndly, let me speak to any of you who are now orphans, and perhaps have been so a considerable time. What think you of the Psalmist's confidence in the text? Was it presumptuous? was it misplaced? did it deceive him? No such thing. 'The Lord did take him up,' and 'carried him' with unwearied kindness 'even to hoar hairs,' so that 'he died in a good old age, full of days, riches, and honour.' And was David singular in finding a parent in God, when he was forsaken of all other? Far from it. Numbers of children, early bereaved, have found themselves taken up as children of Providence. 'Though they were poor and needy, the Lord cared for them.' Like Jabez, they early 'called on the Lord God of

Israel: Oh, that thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast; and that thine hand might be with me, and that thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me! And God granted them that which they requested.' The evils to which, as orphans, they seemed almost necessarily about to fall a prey, were not suffered to grieve them. An invisible Hand was with them, as their guard in danger, their guide in perplexity, and their strength in labour. They were blessed indeed, and their coast enlarged, and their resources multiplied, till they have been constrained to reflect with admiring and grateful Jacob, 'With my staff I passed over this Jordan, and now I am become two bands.' When those whose parents early forsook them have thus been taken up by the Lord, it is a debt of natural piety they owe Him to speak good of His name. 'O that men would therefore praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works unto the children of men!' It becomes them also who have been befriended, to befriend others in like circumstances, unless they would be guilty of the basest ingratitude. Whomsoever they meet with that are fatherless or motherless, let them 'strengthen their weak hands and confirm their feeble knees, and say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong; fear not; behold your God.'

But, lastly, I must say a few words to those who are parents. You may be joyful husbands

and wives now: you may be joyful fathers and mothers now; and 'I rejoice with you that do rejoice.' But, perhaps, I may soon be called to 'weep with those that weep.' A stroke is coming which will take you away from 'your strength, the joy of your glory, the desire of your eyes, and that whereon you set your minds, your sons and your daughters.' Are you prepared for that stroke? and are you preparing your children against the worst effects of it? How are you to be prepared, and to prepare them? Thus, my brethren, thus—by 'seeking first' for yourselves, and for them, 'the kingdom of God, and his righteousness.' Be personally attentive to piety and goodness; and bring your young families up 'in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.' This is the only way of safety for you and them; but this is safe. So says Solomon plainly: 'The just man walketh in his integrity: his children are blessed after him.' And so said our Psalmist, and after long experience and observation too: 'I have been young, and now am old: yet never saw I the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging their bread.' These promises of the Divine favour you will remark are given to 'the just,' 'the righteous,' and their families, and confined to them. You may 'search the Scriptures,' but you will find no such promises to 'the unjust,' 'the unrighteous,' and their families. On the contrary, you will find this

in the book of Scripture, and in the book of Providence too: 'The curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked;' 'but he blesseth the habitation of the just.' So 'be just, and fear not.' 'Keep the commandments and the statutes of the Lord your God; and then it shall be well with you, and with your children after you.'

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